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THE PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS.

THE

Preacher's Complete Homiletical
C O M M E N T A R Y

ON THE

OLD TESTAMENT

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN),

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c. &c.

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS.

London:

RICHARD D. DICKINSON, 89 FARRINGDON STREET.

1891.

A

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON THE

BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS.

BY

REV. GEO. BARLOW,

AUTHOR OF "HOMILETIC COMMENTARY ON THE BOOKS OF KINGS," ETC.

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PREFACE.

PREACHERS appear to have shunned the BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS, as if it lacked suggestiveness for homiletic purposes; and there are comparatively few sermons based on texts selected from this portion of Holy Writ. It may be that the undertone of melancholy, that runs so sadly through the five elegies of which the book is composed, has created the impression that the theme is too monotonous to admit of the freshness and variety expected from the pulpit of the present day. A little patient study of the book in detail will correct that impression. The predominating subject is indeed a story of desolation and sorrow; but it is told with a marvellous versatility of poetic imagery and with exquisite pathos.

The LAMENTATIONS are more than the lamentations of Jeremiah—more than the lamentations of the Jews, who were the immediate and principal sufferers in the disasters narrated: they are typical of a sorrow that is as universal as humanity. Individuals or nations, brooding over conscious unfaithfulness and sin, and smitten with the conviction that the misery in which they are whelmed is the just and bitter fruit of their own reckless disobedience, will find in the Lamentations, as they cannot elsewhere, the most appropriate words in which to voice their grief. We cannot conceive of any possible phase of human misery that may not be fittingly expressed in some portion of this remarkable book, and that will not find some relief in being thus expressed. Trouble fills a large space in our experience of life, and the homilete will find in the study of this tragic poem the many varied forms in which the sufferer may give utterance to his distress, whether in an individual or a collective capacity.

This Commentary contains 161 outlines, brief or more extended, of which 136 are original: the remaining 25 bear the names of their respective authors.

The comprehensive and lucid INTRODUCTION to this work is written by the Rev. D. G. WATT, M.A. The *Exegetical Notes* at the head of each chapter are also supplied by the same writer, and will be found not only a faithful exposition of the text, but also, if studied in connection with each homiletic paragraph, a suggestive help to the thoughtful sermoniser.

Great care has been exercised in the selection of the 262 ILLUSTRATIONS, and it is believed that these will be regarded as not the least valuable feature in the Commentary.

The BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS is not the poem of despair. There is nothing more dismally depressing than the monotone of unmitigated grief. Throughout the eloquent wail of the Poet-Prophet the spiritualised ear detects the recurring notes of a growing hope—timidly expressed at first, but gradually gaining strength and confidence. The darkest period is not without shimmerings of coming light. The morning of rescue dawns: despair gives place to hope, and defeat is followed with the joy of triumph.

GEO. BARLOW.

HOMILETIC COMMENTARY

ON

THE LAMENTATIONS.

INTRODUCTION.

Name.—All literatures—Hebrew, English, and the rest—bear witness to the forces with which sorrowful emotions press for utterance. Hence comes the ancient and widespread custom of making public recognition of the decease of famous or beloved persons; of the disasters of cities and countries. Speeches or orations more or less eloquent, poems more or less deep-toned, are handed along the centuries, and remind the readers that man's state in every land is shadowed by clouds of dark and mournful hue. The Hebrew people were exposed to many such sad and sunless times, perhaps more awful than have overtaken any other people, and the "almost unalloyed expression of unrestrained anguish and utter inconsolable desolation" given by this book may be taken as proof thereof. No wonder that it is commonly called "*The Lamentations.*" It is not classified in ordinary Hebrew Bibles by this term. There it is denominated **Aicah**, the Hebrew equivalent to "How," which is the first word of the book. Rabbinical writers have styled it **Qinoth**. That is the word which denotes the ode composed by David on the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 17), as also similar compositions elsewhere in the Old Testament. It is also employed in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25, where it is recorded, *And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations (qinoth) unto this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold they are written in the lamentations (qinoth)*. Some expositors hold that the five elegies collected in this book are those lamentations on Josiah's death. Others, seeing the unlikelihood of this, aver that the fourth chapter is identical with the dirges of Jeremiah. Against this stands the fact that that event, instead of being the refrain of the elegy, receives but the slightest allusion, if it is an allusion at all (chap. iv. 20). It seems more reasonable to suppose that the lamentations of the prophet and singers over Josiah's death have not been transmitted to us, as other portions of ancient Hebrew literature have not. For, assuredly, the references of this elegiac collection are to casualties far more painful and depressing than the removal of the noblest of kings, and truly fit to give the name to this book during succeeding centuries.

Form.—The book is poetical and unusually technical in its framework. In other Biblical poetical books the usual division into chapters and verses is not always made according to the structure, and sometimes even breaks into the sense of a passage. In Lamentations there are no untoward separations. Its five chapters are five distinct odes or elegies, and each ode is divided into twenty-two parts

regulated by the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the verses of the first four chapters following, on the whole, the order of the alphabet. Thus:—

Chap. i. Each verse, while beginning with a word which has a letter of the alphabet in its grammatical order, is constituted of three double clauses.

Chap. ii. Constructed similarly to chap i., except that the letter seventeenth in the normal order is placed before the sixteenth—a course which is kept up in the two succeeding chapters.

Chap. iii. Differs from the two preceding in having three double clauses, each of which is made a verse in our English versions, beginning with the same letter of the alphabet.

Chap. iv. Takes a structure like that of chap. ii., with the exception of having only two double clauses in every verse.

Chap. v. Is divided as the others into twenty-two verses, but the verses do not put their initial words in the order of the alphabet.

No satisfactory explanation has been suggested for the variation of the order of the alphabet in chapters ii., iii., and iv. Difference from that order is found also in Psalms xxxiv. and cxlv.

The technicality or artificiality of the form is plain. And it is as plain that it would be next to impossible to present that formal structure in a translation, and at the same time do justice to the original. Merely as an illustration of the *form* of the book, the first two verses of chapter iii. are appended:—

1. Affliction, by the rod of His wrath, I am the man that hath seen.
And He hath led me, caused me to walk in darkness, not in light.
Against me surely He turneth His hand, again and again all the day.
2. Broken my bones hath He, and made old my flesh and skin.
Builded against me hath He, and compassed me with gall and travail.
By dark places hath He made me to dwell, as those that have been ever dead.

Certain suggestions made to account for this technical form are hardly to be entertained, *e.g.*, that it is a sign of a simulated grief: a product of later and degenerated taste or of a declining art: the resource of a poet who is inferior in spiritual feeling: a means of joining in sentences thoughts which are only loosely related to each other. Is it not rather the token that a grief, which had benumbed the faculty of expression, has passed the emotional stage and begins to traverse the reflective? There, in the effort to express itself in a peculiar form, it finds a counteractive to its masterful depression. Why should we ascribe this to unreal emotion, or to decadence of art, or to inferiority of faculty, any more than we should ascribe the peculiar form of "In Memoriam" to either of these influences? May not the intensest feelings find utterance in an elegy which employs the order of an alphabet in the beginning of its lines, as well as in an ode of Horace which uses long and short syllables in unvarying succession, or as in a sonnet of Shakspeare employing words of the same sound at the end of certain lines? Surely a deep sorrow can find a distraction in putting its phases into special verbal form, whether that form shows itself at the end of lines, as in English, or all through the lines, as in Latin, or at the beginning of lines, as in this and other specimens of Hebrew literature. "Tersely and vividly, thought after thought shaped itself round each letter of the alphabet in order, while in the effort the writer found relief for his anguish."

Contents.—The Jewish historian Josephus makes the statement that "Jeremiah composed a dirge for Josiah's funeral, which remains unto this day." Does this prove that he identified that dirge with this series of dirges? It is, to say the least, doubtful. If it is a valid proof, there can be little hesitation in regarding Josephus as mistaken. Each chapter of the Lamentations might be adduced in evidence that it was penned under the pressure of grief, not for a deceased sovereign, but for a prostrated kingdom—for an utterly ruined metropolis; for the

covenant people disgraced, outraged, captives, in despair. Again and again are the wretched conditions sketched in the most sombre colours, and, to the eyes of a distant age, with a sort of monotony tending to irksomeness. For "sorrow is distasteful to those who are not suffering it." A cursory glance at the several chapters is all that is needed here.

In the *first* the lamentation is chiefly over the desolated city, and the people plundered, starved, and carried into captivity amid the taunts and brutality of the enemy.

In the *second* it is the wrath of Jehovah, taking vengeance upon the persistent sins of His people, which is depicted. Herein the sweeping away of means of worship, the terrible anguish of men and women, mothers and their little children, the hopelessness of all human effort, and the imperious need of pleading the mercy of the Lord, are pourtrayed.

In the *third* the form of the subject-matter is diverse from that of the other chapters. A thoughtful reader will notice a characteristic feature, the bearing of which he will desire to understand. It is that the writer seems to speak largely of his own personal experiences, occasionally sinking his own under those of others. He begins with the outburst, *I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath*, and continues in the same manner to the verge of despair. Then, as in a more illustrious case, he realises that when he is weak he is really strong, and for a moment there is hope, and a vision of a wider area: *It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed*. His own case is again referred to (ver. 24), only, however, as a momentary step towards embracing the Israel of God who trust on Him (vers. 25-39). Here the impersonal is left, and again (vers. 40-47) the associated community makes known its aims and hardships: *Let us search and try our ways*. Once more, to the end of the chapter, it is the individual who laments and implores recompense. How is this interchange of persons to be accounted for, here as also in certain portions of other poetical parts of the Scriptures? Assuredly by the supposition that the consciousness of the writer testifies to him that his sufferings are representative of his nation's sufferings, or, as Cheyne says, "of those of the pious believers who formed the kernel of the Israelitish people." Accepting this representativeness, we perceive why the expressions of sadness and dismay are such as go beyond mere individual experience, or are such as can be predicted only of an individual who felt as if the whole burden of the tribulation was laid upon himself. It is ever thus with hearts that are sensitive to the visitations of trouble which they share in common with others, and it becomes hard to distinguish the personal from the collective sorrows and pains.

In the *fourth* gruesome details of the calamities which had overtaken all classes—matrons and young children, princes and nobles, prophets and priests—are outlined: outlines which show the hand of an eyewitness. It concludes with an appeal to and a denunciation of Edom, the age-long, bitter adversary of Judah.

The *fifth* begins with a prayer, and then proceeds to draw up something like a list of the errors and outrages which had characterised the national history. It closes with a hesitating call upon Jehovah to turn the people to Himself and restore their ancient glory.

From such a view of the contents Keil suggests one may "readily perceive in these poems a well-cogitated plan in the treatment of the material common to the whole, and a distinct progress in the execution of this plan." This may be open to doubts. If earlier expositors failed to affix the contents of the different elegies to the different leading features of the Chaldean invasion—the siege, the capture, the desolation of the Temple, city, and land—the attempt of Keil, or any other, also fails to make clear a definite plan and progression moulding the whole. Whatever be the connection of one chapter with another, it is the connection of a common subject rather than a connection formed by the order of thought. Besides that there seems no other clue needed to thread our way. The exposition

must be the exposition of separate poems; at any rate not of a drama with five acts, as the imagination of Ewald makes out the contents to form.

In contrast with opinions already referred to, regarding the poetical vigour of this book, that of one who cannot be ranked as a poor judge of poetry—the late Dean of St. Paul's, Milman—may be cited. In his "History of the Jews" he says, "Never was ruined city lamented in language so exquisitely pathetic. Jerusalem is, as it were, personified, and bewailed with the passionate sorrow of private and domestic attachment. While the more general pictures . . . are successively drawn with all the life and reality of an eyewitness." It may be interesting to present a specimen of the manner in which the Dean translates the original (from chap. v.).

"Remember, Lord, what hath befallen,
Look down on our reproach :
Our heritage is given to strangers,
Our home to foreigners.
Our water have we drank for money ;
Our fuel hath its price.

Princes were hung up by the hand,
And age had no respect.
Young men are grinding at the mill,
Boys faint 'neath loads of wood.
The elders from the gate have ceased,
The young men from their music.

The crown is fallen from our head,
Woe ! woe ! that we have sinned.
'Tis therefore that our hearts are faint,
Therefore our eyes are dim,
For Zion's mountain desolate ;
Foxes walk on it."

Author.—The name of no author is attached to the book, or to any of its separate elegies. In Hebrew MSS. and Bibles the book generally appears in the third division of the canonical books of the Old Testament called *K'thubim*, between Ruth and Ecclesiastes. This is no criterion as to its authorship; for "the Lamentations, as being lyrical poetry, are classed, not with prophecies, but with the Psalms and Proverbs," according to the understood arrangement of the canon by the Jews. It is an old and concurrent tradition to name the prophet Jeremiah as the sole author. This tradition is formulated by the Septuagint translator. He prefaces the book with words which are not found in any extant Hebrew MS., *And it came to pass, after Israel had been carried captive and Jerusalem was desolated, Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem and said, How, &c.* Whatever be the historical worth of this statement, the ascription to Jeremiah is backed up by Josephus and the Talmudical writers. Such testimonies have been accepted by subsequent students until a comparatively recent period. Indeed, it is only within the present century that anything like material objections have been made to the traditional belief. The gravity of these objections may be measured by the consideration that it is principally derived from the words and style of the poems. And the operations of such attempts are far from uniform. "The absence of certain specific Jeremianic peculiarities," which Schrader adduces, is counterbalanced by his own acknowledgment of its affinity in contents, spirit, tone, and language with Jeremiah's prophecies. Keil represents Naegelsbach, in Lange's series, as having, "with the help of the concordance, prepared a table of these words and forms of words found in Lamentations, but not occurring in the prophecies of Jeremiah," and so concluding against the authorship of the prophet. On the other hand, Dr. Hornblower, translator of Naegelsbach, and Keil present the evidence of passages

in contradiction of Naegelsbach's conclusion. Attributing the book to Ezekiel may be looked on as an exhibition of ingenuity and not of convincing effect. Besides this, there is extreme diversity of opinion regarding the composition of the separate odes. Ewald maintains that "every competent judge will ascribe [these five poems] to only one poet." Thenius assures us that chaps. ii. and iv. are "undeniably from Jeremiah," chaps. i. and iii. from some unknown resident in Judæa, and chap. v. from the leader of a band of wanderers seeking an asylum. Cheyne is sure that the first, second, and fourth chapters are not the productions of Jeremiah; that the third chapter is by a different author from these, probably by one who was acquainted with Jeremiah's prophecies; and the fifth chapter "very certainly not by the author of any of the foregoing Lamentations," though he regards it as probable that "Jeremiah was the favourite book of these poets (next to the Psalter, so far as this book was in existence)."

To pronouncements on such precarious evidence there can be but one fair attitude—that of suspense, until more definite contingents than those represented by words and style are forthcoming. For this sort of evidence is by no means conclusive either for or against the genuineness of any writings. It may or may not be important, as it is related to other conditions. It may betoken different authors, or it may be the same author in altered circumstances of thought and life. His age, new events, the limitations of his subject, his purpose in writing—each one of these will be a modifying element in his choice and allocation of words. It is therefore unwise and hazardous to assert positively whether Jeremiah was the author or not, unless we can decide, approximately at any rate, how he and his style would be affected by the points just referred to. This has not been done, and, until something of this kind is done, the tradition that Jeremiah is the author of all or chief part of the Lamentations is entitled to preference. It is indeed little matter who the writer or writers might be when they are moved by the Spirit of God.

There is one topic yet unnoticed which may be a difficulty in the way of accepting the traditional belief, and it is raised by that artificial *form* of the Lamentations already described. Could that form have been given them so close to the occurrence of the fearful calamities as Jeremiah must have been? Could he, with his intense sensitiveness to the sins and miseries of his fellow-countrymen, have sat, as tradition reports, among the ruinous heaps of Jerusalem, and, in sight of the fiery ordeal through which his ill-treated people were passing, busied himself with the technicalities of poetic art? Must not the condition for the composition of such poems be not that of perturbation but of reflectiveness? Are not the mitigations of time requisite, has not the emotion already parted with its overwhelming vehemence, before downcast men will care to express their grief in peculiar forms? "We are recovering from love or grief or any other passion when we are able to rhyme on it with elegance" (*Daily News*, in review of "Poems of Afghanistan"). This may be true; but there is another view. In poignant trouble a short time may appear long, and the words, *Wherefore dost thou forsake us so long time?* (ch. v. 20), are not so decisive as to settle the question whether a longer or shorter period had intervened between the desolation of Jerusalem and the production of the elegies. "We should count time by heart-throbs." In reference to this Cheyne quotes from "The Dream of Gerontius":—

" . . . time is not a common property ;
But what is long is short, and swift is slow,
And near is distant as received and grasped
By this mind and by that, and every one
Is standard of his own chronology."

Thus the element of time brings no ingredient to solve the riddle of authorship. It cannot eliminate the claim of Jeremiah. He could have written the five poems

so far as his intense sorrow was concerned. There is much force in a remark made by Richm: "In lyric poetry proper the employment of this artificial form is naturally and intrinsically justified only when a single fundamental strain, that fills the whole soul of the poet,—deep, strong, and sustained—seeks to die away in many different forms of chords."

Date.—There is no chronological record as to the time of composition except that which is involved in the fact that the awfulness of the desolation was fresh in the writer's mind. And if he was not Jeremiah, he, or they who wrote, may be supposed to have written under the impulse of "a great lyric movement," which Ewald conceives took place "among the conquered Jews, as well those in Babylon as those who remained in their much-loved home." And he believes the Lamentations came into their existing form coincident with that movement. But beyond all such considerations it is to be remembered that the thought which the writer or writers wanted to present was in no sense dependent on a date.

The structure and contents of the Lamentations are seen to be unique. No one of the collection of documents containing record of the unfolding of God's will to His servants during centuries can be compared with it. It makes infinitesimal additions to history, and contributes next to nothing to dogmatics. It is at the apex of the literature of sorrow, and reverberates with the thought that sins against the living holy Lord bring condign punishment. The diverse peculiarities suggest two questions which are not irrelevant, and may be considered briefly.

1. Why should a composition, so obviously technical, be a factor in the revelation of God and His will? Or it may be put thus, Why should *holy men of God, moved by the Holy Spirit*, trammel or order their emotions by the demands of an alphabet and metre? It was an old Greek and Roman belief that, "When the gods spoke they spoke in verse" (*Hatch*). Why should not the only true God make use of men who were born poets? If the susceptibility to, and expression in poetic forms be an endowment He has bestowed; if there are abounding materials in nature and the life of humanity fitted for such forms; if the rudest tribes and the most cultured nations appreciate them, as affecting the mind for good and evil, for pleasure and pain, is it to be credited that He who made all these capacities will refuse to employ them as a vehicle for the transmission of the sublime truths of eternal righteousness and love? Surely the presentation of the data requisite to poetic form will solve the question propounded.

Moreover, poetry, with its measured rhythm, is more likely to be remembered than prosaic expression. With reference especially to the Jewish people it has been said, "The obvious advantages of the poetic style and of a metrical structure are—the adaptation of both to the tastes and culture of the people; and especially the adaptation of the latter to the purpose of storing those compositions in the memory from infancy upward. Thus it was that the minds of this—indeed favoured though afflicted—people were richly furnished with religious and moral sentiments, and thus was meditative thought nourished and suggested and directed, and was made conducive to the momentous purposes of the individual and of the domestic spiritual life. Too little do we now take account, in our Biblical readings and criticisms, of this deep-going purpose of Hebrew poetic Scriptures which, through centuries of national weal and woe, have nourished millions on millions of souls 'unto life eternal.'" (*Isaac Taylor*.)

2. Cheyne remarks, "We cannot fail to see in this short elegaic book that peculiar quality which, in all its degrees of manifestation, the Jewish Doctors agree with us in describing as inspiration." Granted. But are not inspiration and the limitations of an alphabet and definite numbers mutually exclusive, or restrictive at least? Was the soul of an inspired man but "as a flute through which the breath of God flowed in Divine music"? Or had that soul power over itself, and, as a boat whose sails are filled with a breeze, could take any course except dead against the breath of God? Various solutions of the perplexity have been

attempted, but no one altogether satisfactory has been formulated, and the discussions still carried on prove that the premises for sufficient conclusions are yet unsettled. It would help to the acquisition of such premises if, on all sides, preconceived ideas of inspiration were resolutely thrown off, and the somewhat obscure indications in the Bible itself were cleared up and harmonised so far as could be. How did the Lord *speak* to men of old? How was it that a prophet could know that it was His *word which was in his heart, as it were a burning fire shut up in his bones*? What is it to *speak from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit*? What are the criteria of being *in the Spirit*? Such inquiries suggest further questions. Was the realm of inspiration by the Spirit of the Lord so closely interlinked with the region of His operations in the new birth that it could not be known whence the afflatus came or whither it went? If a prophet was speaking in the old Church of Corinth, and one sitting by the speaker *had a revelation*, what was it which enabled the *others* to discriminate that a fresh inspiration had been vouchsafed and the first speaker was to *keep silence*? Is that discriminating power withdrawn wholly? Are there not subtle tokens by which a man in Christ even now may discern inspiration in himself and in another brother? The answer to those inquiries may never be definite, there is so much unknown, but qualified research and devout patience may be taught, as God will, to see some undetected aspects of inspiration, even if it be impossible to embrace in one formula all the facts. So we may need to rest contented with the truth that to one member of the body of Christ is given *the discerning of spirits in the one Spirit*, but also be convinced that there is a wider range in which *he that is spiritual judgeth all the things of the Spirit of God*. In that conviction we may feel that the "quality" of inspiration is present throughout the technical construction of the Lamentations, as also we can find *in the form of a servant, Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden*.

Purpose.—The elegies issue out of the preceding history of the Jewish people, and thus stand related to other portions of the sacred Scriptures, even if the points of contact appear to us under a haze. They are resonant with chords formed by the claims of God, who *makes judgment the line and righteousness the plummet* in His dealings with men. They signify that moral decadence is in closest alliance with religious compromises; that rueful calamities seize on a nation which swerves from its normal position; that if a people favoured by God, Creator and King, stand in the way of the knowledge of His saving health among all nations, down that people must go, no matter what it has been in His procedure hitherto. This result would be promoted by the repetitions of ideas and even expressions which are frequent throughout the book. Such a feature certainly detracts from its literary finish, but we must suppose that the author did not give heed to that. He might have managed to improve its symmetry if he had tried. Obviously he did not try. He had an end in view, which a finished literary form would not have brought him to so well as the redundant form he has adopted. And, if we dare define what his aim was, we should say that he wanted to portray an impressive picture of a country, people, worship, God-forsaken because God-forsaking. The unusual structure of the book also would tend to deepen this impression. Thus an enduring symbol was erected of that long course of scatterings and wanderings, of insults and oppressions, which was to be trod by the Jewish tribes. At any rate the Great Revealer was opening up, by these outbursts of grief, some fresh aspect of His character and purpose; intimating that He had brought to a further stage the discipline and development of Israel, with whom He had entered into covenant, and was forging a new link, into which another link in due course would be welded, so as to extend the outstretch of that chain which should lift the world into a wider life. Then, *when the fulness of the time came*, Jesus Christ, who searched the Scriptures, as He directed others to do, found His sympathy stirred in unison with these Lamentations: *When He saw the city He*

wept over it, because its enemies should not leave one stone upon another, and because it knew not the time of its visitation.

The prophecies of Ezekiel, not a few of which must have been contemporaneous with the publication of the Lamentations, have one ever-recurring refrain, *And they shall know that I am Jehovah*. Since that was the goal towards which all the changes of that time were leading men, and as this book pointed in the same direction, we may have a valid presentiment that it helped towards the formation of the new spirit which pervaded the Jews *when the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion*. They had voiced their laments here, their prayers in such a Psalm as the seventy-fourth, and then followed their praise: *The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad*.

Liturgical Use.—Jewish synagogues have recognised the bearing of the Lamentations by appointing that they should be read on the anniversary day commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temple. In the Christian Church also their importance has been regarded. The Roman Catholic Church assigns three portions of the book to be read as part of the ritual of each of the three last days of Passion-week. In the German United Evangelical Church, adaptations are made for liturgical use. In the revised Prayer Book of the Episcopal Church of England, “portions are ordered to be read on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in Holy-week.” The reasons for such use of these elegies may have been (1) that a homeless nation and desolated city suggested the condition of mankind far from God, and of a soul doomed to die in the bondage of sin; and (2) that the sorrows of the representative of the suffering people suggested *the Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world*, and of whom we cannot but think as enduring a sorrow like unto no other sorrow.

What one and another portion of the Lamentations has been for the expression of emotion to the tried and troubled of many a country and age, none but God, the all-knowing, can declare. Assuredly they still will be so used, even until *the Lord Jehovah shall wipe away the tears from off all faces, and the reproach of His people shall He take away from off all the earth*.

NOTE.—In the translation I have generally adhered to the Revised Version. I have deviated from it where I aimed to express more literally what I consider the representation of the Hebrew original. I offer no apology for always using our time-honoured word Jehovah instead of the pedantic Yahveh.

D. G. W.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISERIES OF JERUSALEM.

EXEGETICAL NOTES.—This elegy may be divided into two chief parts. The first, vers. 1–11, exhibits the mournful condition of an unnamed city, overtaken by various calamities, with a break, at vers. 9 and 11, by an ejaculatory appeal to Jehovah. The second, vers. 12–22, contains a bitter complaint from the city herself, or rather from the city personified by a sufferer.

Vers. 1 and 2 present the city as she is in sharp contrast with what she was, and as an object of deep distress, on account of her sins and their penalties. The verses have a pictorial illustration in the medal struck by the Roman Emperor Titus in commemoration of the capture of Jerusalem (A.D. 71).

(N) Ver. 1. **How**, not in interrogation, but in surprise and pain. This particle is unnecessarily inserted twice in the Authorised Version. It is not again employed in the Hebrew of the book, except in chaps. ii. 1 and iv. 1, 2, **sitteth alone**, in a posture of overpowering sorrow rather than of utter isolation, like Nehemiah, who, when he heard of the doleful state of Jerusalem, *sat down and wept and mourned* (i. 4), **the city** = Jerusalem, as following verses prove. The fact that the Chaldean captain *left of the poor of the people, which had nothing, in the land of Judah* (Jer. xxxix. 10) suggests that a few waifs and strays might be still hanging round the ruined city, while the reference (chap. ii. 10) to *the elders of the daughter of Zion* may intimate that some of better means were also with them; **that was full of people**. No known criterion exists by which to estimate the population of ancient Jerusalem. An approximate guess even cannot be made from the perfunctory census taken in David's reign. **She is become as a widow**, forsaken and under the reproach of widowhood, seeing that she is not in communion with the Lord, her Maker; but still she is not quite a widow; there is to be a restoration, because for *a small moment have I forsaken thee . . . saith the Lord thy Redeemer* (Isaiah liv. 6); **that was great among the nations**, respected and powerful; **a princess over the provinces**. The dominion centered in Jerusalem is illustrated by the letter of Artaxerxes to his subordinates, *There have been mighty kings over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all the country beyond the river; and tribute, custom, and toll was paid unto them* (Ezra iv. 20). This jurisdiction over dependent peoples was at its height in the reigns of David and Solomon, though after them there were also kings whose rule embraced others beside the Jews. In sad contrast she **is become a vassal**, generally shown by taskwork, not so often by money-payment, and expressing entire subservience.

(2) Ver. 2. Intense grief overwhelms her, **She weeps bitterly in the night**; no temporary oblivion comes to her; the silent hours pass with her tears on her cheeks. **For her there is no comforter among all her lovers**; all her friends, or neighbours, have dealt treacherously with her. *The Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them* (Ezek. xxiii. 23), were alienated from her, while Egypt, Ammon, Edom, Moab, disowned their alliance with her: **they are become her enemies**, and gloat over her downfall (2 Kings xxiv. 2).

(A) Ver. 3. **Judah**, the population of the whole territory, with that of Jerusalem, **is taken into exile**, a subjugated, impoverished remnant being left. **From affliction**, the same expression occurs in Exod. iii. 17 and Ps. cviii. 4, **and from much servitude**, not, as might seem intimated by the Authorised Version and Revised Version, that the Jews were led into captivity because of the manumitted Hebrew servants being again subjected to bondage by their richer brethren (v. Jer. xxxiv. 8–12); not that the Jews fled as voluntary emigrants to escape the oppression of conquerors; but that, from the low depth of misery into which they had been brought by the invasions and exactions of foreign powers, from months of faction and coercion and famine, they were taken into the lower depth of being made captives. In Babylon, in the centre of old world civilisation, with its traffic and magnificence, **she has not found rest**. Nebuchadnezzar employed "them upon those large works of irrigation and the building of cities, for which his ambition required labourers, just where they were forced to share and contribute to Babylonian life." *Thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke* (Isa. xlviii. 6). **All her pursuers have overtaken her between the straits**; they laid affliction upon her when she was already pressed in by trouble; hit her when she was down.

(7) Ver. 4 introduces another view personifying the religious condition: not the banished people, not the fallen city, but the dwelling-place of the Holy One of Israel is forsaken and overthrown. **The ways of Zion**, not the streets in Jerusalem leading up to the Temple, but the roads from all quarters of the land, which found their termini in the *Holy hill*, are mournful, for they are entirely deserted; **being without those who go to a solemn assembly**, none come to appear before the Lord in His courts at set times, as He had enjoined His worshippers to do; **all her gates**, which Jehovah loveth, are desolate, broken down; no one goes up to or lingers about them. The Temple has lost its sanctity and is open to all intruders. The glory has departed from it: **her priests are sighing**; **her virgins are afflicted**. "The reason why the priests and the virgins are here conjoined is that lamentation is made over the

cessation of the religious feasts. The virgins are here considered as those who enlivened the national festivals by playing, singing, and dancing (Ps. lxxviii. 26; Jer. xxxi. 13)" (Kell). And she is in bitterness herself, as if all was lost religiously as well as politically.

(7) Ver. 5. Her adversaries are become the head, as was threatened if unfaithful to the Lord (Dent. xxviii. 44); her enemies prosper, are in peace, and rest secure, knowing that all resistance is over, so completely has she been crushed. This was brought about not by their might, but because Jehovah has afflicted her for the greatness of her transgressions; and the sufferings befall the most innocent also; her young children have gone captives, the most ominous of all her disasters, driven like a band of the enslaved in Africa, before the adversary.

(8) Ver. 6. She has not only been harried of her most precious and tender charges, also from the daughter of Zion is departed all her beauty. God Himself, whose Shechinah made Zion the perfection of beauty, no longer shined there; no longer was there a worship of Him in the beauty of holiness, and even her princes are become like harts that do not find pasture; enfeebled by the scanty diet of the close siege, they have lost vigour, and go without strength when chased before the pursuer, so as to be easily caught. This is in evident allusion to the flight and capture of the King and his men of war, within a few miles from Jerusalem, when it was besieged by the Chaldean army (2 Kings xxv. 3-5).

(9) Ver. 7. Again a change of aspect is presented. Already the city ruined, the people exiled, the holy mountain desecrated have been regarded. Now the poet gives the name of the city, which he shrank from pronouncing before, and uses it as a generic, all-embracing term, Jerusalem remembers, adding an item of pungency to her deep sufferings, in the days of her affliction and—a probable meaning of the following word is *wanderings*, as in margin of Revised Version here. In chap. iii. 19, where the same word is again employed, the margin gives *outcast state* as a fresh rendering. That of the Speaker's Commentary is to be preferred—homelessness, describing the state of the Jews cast out of their homes and driven into banishment; all her pleasant things which were from the days of old. *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.* "Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." When her people fell into the hand of the adversary, and there is no helper to her; the adversaries see her, they sneer at her cessations (*desolations* in Revised Version). This last Hebrew word occurs only here. Its root means to cease, and so this derivative is applied, as by Plumptre, to "the enforced Sabbaths of untilled land, and the Sabbaths conspicuous for the absence of any religious rites." This seems far-fetched, except as to the latter part, and this should be considered as but a portion of the Jewish customs which had been discontinued. If Romans derided the Jews for cessation from work on the seventh day of the week, Babylonians would not. They may have mocked at the faith of Israel in the supremacy of Jehovah, seeing they regarded Him as a subjugated national deity; but "it was no subject of wonder to the Babylonians that the Jews celebrated a weekly day of rest, as they had one of their own (*sabbatu*)"—(Cheyne).

(10) Ver. 8. Jerusalem has sinned a sin, has broken the law of her God with determinate will, and bears the natural penalty; therefore she is become an unclean one; not as one who has been removed (Authorised Version) as a captive from her native place, but as one set aside because of impurity. All who honoured her despise her, for they see her nakedness; her evil is laid bare; the very peoples who had respected her, and who had far less knowledge of what was right and true than she, are now alive to the real character of her procedure, and count it shamefully bad. Even Nebuzar-adan, captain of the Babylonian guard, could say, after her overthrow, *Because ye have sinned against Jehovah and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing is come upon you* (Jer. xl. 3). There was still a sensitiveness of conscience in the ideal Jerusalem; Yea, she sighs and turns backward, moaning, as if conscious of spectators and mortified by her open shame, she is fain to screen herself, "as those in such case would do that have any shamefacedness or spark of ingenuity at all in them."

(11) Ver. 9. Her evil is very obvious, her defilement is in her skirts, not below, but manifest on her long flowing robe; she remembers not her latter end; as she continued sinning, she paid no regard to the issue of it all, and, in consequence of this want of forethought, she is come down wonderfully, down to the lowest depth of misery, an astonishment to herself, and to all around her; there is no comforter for her. Her conviction of sin, and shame, and sorrow impels her to go to her God, and she cries, *See, O Jehovah, my affliction, for the enemy doth magnify himself*, the appeal is supported on two bases: (1) Her humiliation; and, (2) The arrogant pretensions of her foes; surely with some vague hope like that of the Psalm-writer, *Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me; thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of thine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me* (cxxxviii. 7).

(12) Ver. 10. His hand the adversary stretches out upon all her pleasant things, treasures of all sorts, thus described by Isaiah (lxiv. 11, 12), *Thy holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion is become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste.* The plundering of the Temple was the most aggravating of all, for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thine assembly; heathens, who were not admissible even into the congregation of the Lord—into religious communion with Israel—had trod the courts which were most holy to Jewish worshippers, and

where only priests could legitimately go, and they had pillaged the pleasant vessels of the house of Jehovah, therewith to adorn the shrines of their idol deities.

(2) Ver. 11. In ver. 4 the priests sigh; in ver. 8 Jerusalem sighs, and here one and all, because in addition to the religious collapse, a terrible bodily hunger is universally felt, so **all her people are sighing, are seeking bread.** This use of participles signifies that both the past and present condition of the people is regarded by the writer. He saw that the scanty meals to which they were reduced when beleaguered by the Chaldean army had not ended after the Temple had been desecrated and despoiled; they had parted and were parting with ornaments, jewellery, every one of their valuables, merely to keep body and soul together; **they give their pleasant things for food**; after a close siege of eighteen months, preceded by the overrunning of the country, food-supplies must have been all but exhausted; **to restore their soul**, to bring back life, to *those who are drawn unto death* (1 Kings xvii. 21), and spiritually to *restore the soul* (Ps. xix. 8). There is bread of which *if any man eat he shall live for ever*, given by Him who gave His *flesh for the life of the world*. Was there any undefinable longing for such bread in the following appeal, similar to that of ver. 9, but somewhat intensified? **See, O Jehovah, and behold, for I am become despised!** Would He take away her reproach? Thus a transition is made to the lamentation and supplication of Jerusalem herself in the following half of this elegy.

Vers. 12-22. These verses form the second section of the poem. The city is represented as complaining of its harassed condition, 12-16, and then as acknowledging her persistent sin in sight of her righteous Lord, who will deal out justice to all transgressors, 17-22.

(5) Ver. 12. The curtness of the opening Hebrew phrase causes doubt as to its proper explanation. Hence by some it is taken as an address to the wayfarers, and is paraphrased in words like, "I pray all you," or "Oh, that my cry might reach all you." By others it is taken as a question, and more reasonably; so they explain it by words like, "Does not my misery come to you?" or "Do you not observe what has befallen me?" In either case it conveys a call, as from the weeping, solitary woman, sitting on the ground, to all travellers to consider her deplorable state, and our English Versions have caught the right tone. **Is it nothing to you, all ye passers by the way?** Is there nothing in my condition to produce seriousness in you instead of indifference or levity? Nothing to warn you? Nothing to call forth your sympathy? **Behold and see if there is sorrow like my sorrow.** The feeling of a troubled present tends to make it loom before the sufferer as if there never was the like before, which is done to me whom Jehovah has afflicted in the day of the heat of his anger.

The ascription, in religious addresses, which has been often made of this verse to the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, is far from commendable. In a very real sense His sorrows were unparalleled, but innocent of sin though He was, He made no attempt to call attention to Himself as peculiarly afflicted. His thought was for others' sufferings. *Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.*

(2) Ver. 13. Here begin references to various events which had contributed to her unequalled sorrow. Fire, a net, sickness and a yoke are set forth. The figure presented in the last clause of the preceding verse is now more fully traced. **From on high he sent fire, Upon the wicked He shall rain fire** (Ps. xi. 6), **into my bones**, where pain is supposed to be most keenly felt. She recognises that the cause, which is behind all visible causes, of her pain is in the spiritual realm, and that in the face of the Eternal Righteousness her bones must be shrivelled up; and it overpowered them. The next figure is, **He spread a net for my feet; he turned me back.** So entangled, she could not go away and escape capture. The third figure is sickness. **He made me desolate, all the day faint.** The light of her life was quenched, and she was constantly exhausted.

(2) Ver. 14. There follows a figure from agricultural pursuits. **A yoke [formed] of my transgressions is bound by his hand.** The Hebrew verb here is of uncertain meaning, and there is no rendering preferable to that which is given. She has made thongs or cords for the yoke with her sins; they are twisted together. Her misdoings have acted and reacted that they are knit together, so as to constitute a thralldom which cannot be thrown off; so intertwined they have come up upon my neck. A consequence of this enthrallment by the knotted yoke is, **it has made my strength to fail**, literally to stumble, *i.e.*, to stagger from the weakness and exhaustion incident to such a fearful yoke. The yoke of transgression is hard; the yoke of Christ is easy. The conviction is now expressed that the Divine Ruler is at work, and a new phase rises in the lamentation. **The Lord has given me into the hands [of those that are against me]. I am not able to stand up.** She can do nothing but yield. Consciousness of transgression paralyses body and mind. Note that it is the general, not the covenant name of her God which she utters. This title occurs fourteen times by itself in this book, while in the Prophecies of Jeremiah only along with the covenant name. The reason for this usage of Lord, and of refraining from Jehovah has yet to be found. To say that the people, in their punishment, felt the Lordship of the Deity more, and His covenant love to them less, is a statement which is not confirmed by an examination of the passages in the Lamentations where each name is found.

(2) Ver. 15. Inability to resist is associated with other fatal experiences. **He has set at naught all my strong ones**; not on an open battlefield, not in a struggle to hold an important post, is it that her able-bodied men are counted for nothing before the Chaldean host; losses

they might have had, "the bubble reputation" attached to them, but not when cooped up in the city, in the midst of me. He has convoked a solemn assembly against me; it is the word used of the annual and other religious festivals, as in ver. 4, and intimates that to the enemies of Jerusalem a call had been issued to gather at an appointed time and have such joy as might be found in the ability to crush my young men, those who promised to be the strength of the nation in the generation following. And, to make the overthrow complete, the maidens, who had been carefully guarded from violence, the Lord has trodden as in a wine-press the virgin daughter of Judah. The treading of the grapes in a wine-press, as illustrative of the execution of divine judgment, is not unusual in the Scriptures (Isa. lxxii. 5; Rev. xiv. 19), and signifies both suffering and good results from suffering rightly borne—

"Still hope and trust, it sang; the rod
Must fall, the wine-press must be trod."

(Y) Ver. 16. Having shown by the events how terrible her sorrow could not but be, Jerusalem reiterates her complaint with a flood of tears. Because of these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runs down with water, so great is her trouble and so unalleviated, for far from me is the comforter, the restorer of my soul. My children are become desolate, and cannot cheer me, for the enemy has prevailed.

(Z) Ver. 17. The sobs of the weeper stifle her utterance. In the pause the poet himself seems to take up the word, something like the part of the chorus in Greek tragedies, and describes the state of the three personified objects—the Temple, the people, the city. He sees that Zion, representing the house of prayer for all nations, stretches out her hands, as praying in a land where no water is, but in suspense; there is no comforter for her. He sees that Jehovah, her covenant God, has commanded concerning Jacob, representing the people whom He chose for His heritage, that those round about him, the neighbouring nations, should be his adversaries. He sees that Jerusalem, representing the government and national aspirations, has become as an unclean one among them (ver. 8).

(S) Ver. 18. During her pause the weeper has received new thoughts. Like the younger son when feeding on husks, she has come to herself so far that she is ready to own the justice of Jehovah in her sufferings. He is righteous, Jehovah, for I have disobeyed his voice, rejected the words of His mouth. Yet she sorely wants human pity, and cries to them, Hear, I pray; all ye peoples, and see my sorrow; the flower of her youth has gone into captivity.

(D) Ver. 19. She addresses Jehovah, and tells how her appeals to the friends of her prosperous days have proved futile; I called to my lovers; they have deceived me, disappointed my hopes; and not only they have failed; my priests and my elders have expired in the city, where they had been high in position, the medium between God and His worshippers, and leaders in the state, when they sought food for themselves to restore their souls, they were starving, like the common people in the closely invested city, and made a strenuous quest for some means to keep themselves alive in famine.

(N) Ver. 20. Again she refers to Jehovah as to her forlornness and aggravated sin. See, O Jehovah, for I am in distress, and this distress is felt: (1) Internally. My bowels are troubled, my heart is turned within me; agitation and anguish excite her, even her vital parts, as it were, change their position. The reason therefor is not ascribed to man's neglect and inhumanity to her, but, (2) to her disregard of God, for, she confesses, I have grievously disobeyed. The penalty she undergoes is calamitous indeed; abroad the sword bereaveth, she is rendered a mourner because of slaughter in the open country and in the streets; at home is like death, as if nothing but the dead were in the houses—so overpowering was the exhaustion from starvation and diseases. This somewhat halting explanation may be compared with the free rendering of the Septuagint translator—at least there is no extant authority in the Hebrew for an equivalent reading—*Outside the sword made me childless as death in the house.*

(T) Ver. 21. A transition is made from unfaithful friends to open enemies, and they too are denounced. The sounds of her grief have echoed far off among persons unnamed, they have heard that I sigh; again the refrain of this chapter is repeated, there is no comforter for me. The frequent allusions to a personal comforter, vers. 2, 9, 16, 17, 21, are worthy of consideration, as if there was a feeling after a higher gift not yet distinctly perceived. All my enemies have heard of my evil, and understand something of the unseen influences which produced it; they rejoice that thou hast done it. From Jer. xl. 2, 3, it appears that even foes recognised that the calamitous state of the Jews proceeded from their disobedience to Jehovah, though their joy may have been more because of her fall than for the confirmation given to the truth of the Lord. Nevertheless, vengeance for their misdeeds was coming on. The Lord has announced a day of judgment on the heathen as well as on Judah, and the cup of wrath shall be drunk from; thou bringest the day thou hast announced, and they shall become like me in suffering their penalties.

(H) Ver. 22. Jerusalem further formulates the wish that the retribution due to their guilty actions should not be put aside; Let all their evil come before thee, and do unto them as thou hast done unto me, for all my transgressions. The first natural cry of those that are punished is for justice all round. "If I suffer for every wrong, make every other wrongdoer

suffer equally with me!" In this desire there appears the consciousness that Jehovah must pass judgment upon every form of sin, and rightly, for He *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*; and also a grim expectation of revenge, under which Edom, Moab, Babylon, &c., disappeared. We may say that confession of her own transgressions should have been accompanied with sympathy and pity for other sinners; but the time for that love of enemies did not arrive for many a day. Her own sad state again moves her, *For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint*. So Jeremiah felt (viii. 18). "With these words the sound of this lamentation dies away."

HOMILETICS.

GRIEF FOR A RUINED CITY.

(Verses 1, 2.)

There is a fine piece of statuary representing the figure of a Hebrew female in a sitting posture, the head and shoulders slightly bent forward, the hair escaping in disordered tresses from the neatly plaited fillets, the arms, carelessly crossed over each other, resting helplessly in her lap, the eyes, moistened with tears, gazing wistfully on the ground, and the face expressing in every feature the tenderest pathos of sorrow. The whole figure seems to quiver with irrepressible emotion. Every part is moulded with voluptuous grace, and is susceptible of the deepest passion, but it is the passion of an inconsolable grief! The genius of the artist has thus sought to idealise unhappy Judah weeping amid the scattered fragments of national ruin. It is a reproduction, by the art of the nineteenth century, of the same sad image that appeared on the well-known medal of Titus, struck to celebrate his triumph over Jerusalem—a woman sitting weeping beneath a palm-tree, and below is inscribed the legend *Judea capta*. It is startling to observe how exactly the heathen conqueror copied the poetic description by Jeremiah of the forlorn condition to which his beloved country was reduced. These words describe a pathetic picture of *grief for a ruined city*.

I. **Because of its utter desolation.** "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people" (ver. 1). There is a tradition that Jeremiah wrote these elegies in a grotto that is still shown, situated in the face of a rocky hill on the western side of Jerusalem; and there is a freshness and versatility in the images employed, as if every time he glanced at the ruins of the ill-fated city, full in his view, he was unable to repress a new outburst of grief. He had seen Jerusalem in prosperity, its Temple thronged with worshippers, its commerce flourishing, its people content and joyous; but now all is changed; the market-place is empty, the streets silent, the princes and people in exile, and the Temple, which the Jew fondly dreamed invulnerable, was a heap of ruins. Such desolation was unparalleled in the history of the nation and in the experience of the prophet, and his heart was riven with anguish. We may read about the decay of great cities without emotion; but to witness the demolition of our own city is a different matter.

II. **Because of the loss of its beloved chief.** "How is she become as a widow!" (ver. 1). A city is often described as the mother of its inhabitants, the king as husband, the princes as children. When the king is gone, and not even a representative is left, the city is widowed and orphaned indeed. The condition of an Eastern widow is pitiable. Her hair is cut short, she strips off all her ornaments, eats the coarsest food, fasts often, and is all but an outcast in the family of her late husband. The image employed by the prophet would therefore be painfully suggestive to the Jewish mind.

III. **Because of its humiliating subjection.** "She that was great among the nations and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary?" (ver. 1). The older meaning of the word tributary refers not to a money-payment, but to personal labour (Josh. xvi. 10). The city that ruled from the Nile to the Euphrates is now reduced to slavery, and the few inhabitants who are left must render bond-service to a heathen potentate. It is galling to a once proud and

prosperous people to be thus humiliated. They who will not serve God faithfully must be compelled to serve their enemies.

IV. Because of its being cruelly betrayed. "Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies" (ver. 2). Her allies, who made great protestations of attachment when all was prosperous, not only forsake her when adversity comes, but unite with her enemies in completing her destruction. It is a bitter irony of human professions when love turns to enmity and friendship to treachery. "A loose tooth and a fickle friend are two evils." The sooner we are clear of them the better; but who likes the wrench? If we lose the comfort of God, we are not likely to find help in man. We can trust in no one if we cannot trust in God.

V. Is expressed with irresistible pathos. "She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks" (ver. 2). It was a fine touch of poetic genius when the prophet selected a sorrowful woman as an emblem of a disconsolate city. Woman is never so fascinating, so tender, so bewitchingly irresistible in commanding sympathy as when she is in tears! The hardest heart is melted, the sternest enemy subdued. The sorrow of Judah was overwhelming because the ruin was so unexpected and unparalleled. No city has been wept over like Jerusalem. The melancholy wail has been prolonged through the centuries, and is reproduced to-day. The Lamentations are still read yearly by the Jews to commemorate the burning of the Temple. Every Friday, Israelites young and old, of both sexes, gather at the wailing-place in Jerusalem, where a few of the old stones of the Temple still remain in the wall, and, amid tears, recite these sad verses and suitable psalms, as they fervently kiss the stones. On the 9th of the month Ab, nearly our July, this dirge, composed about 600 years before Christ, is read aloud in every synagogue over the world. Weeping is not repentance; but the tears of the contrite do not flow in vain. They are noted in heaven, and God will help.

LESSONS.—1. *The ruin of a once prosperous city is a sad and suggestive spectacle.* 2. *The miseries of others should rouse our compassion.* 3. *The greatest grief finds relief in tears.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 1. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people." **A populous city.** 1. A busy scene of activity, gaiety, sin, sorrow, and complicated experiences. 2. Produces a strange sensation upon the belated visitor when it is hushed in the silence of sleep. 3. Its ruin a subject of profound sorrow and suggestive reflections to one who has known it in the flood-tide of its prosperity.

— "How has she become a widow, she that was great among the nations." **Widowhood.** 1. Suggestive of loss—loss of happiness, solace, guardianship, affection. 2. Implies loneliness, dejection, sorrow. 3. A painful experience when contrasted with a former state of affluence and grandeur.

— "Princes among the provinces, how is she become tributary." **The strange**

reverses of fortune. 1. The ruler becomes the ruled. 2. The free are the conquered. 3. Wealth exchanged for poverty. 4. Life dependent on abject submission to those who were once our inferiors.

Ver. 2. "She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks." **The pathos of tears.** 1. A sublime spectacle in the ideal woman. 2. An evidence of profound sorrow. 3. Gathers its significance from the character of the calamity it bewails. 4. A merciful relief to an intensely sensitive nature.

— "All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies." **The fickleness of human friendships.** I. *Genuine friends are rare.* They may usually be counted on a thumb and finger; the one is the wife or husband, the other is the mother,

who is father, mother, and a great deal more. There is no folly so fanatical as that which flings away a real friend. II. *Friends are plentiful when we do not need their help.* They depend on us more than ever we had occasion to depend on them. While we can help them, their friendship is effusive and their vows of fealty emphatic. When our power declines, so does their attachment: when our circumstances alter, so do they. They are swallow friends, fluttering merrily about us in the summer-time of prosperity, but suddenly become invisible when the winter of adversity sets in. III. *It is a sad proof of the perversity of human nature when a friend is transformed into an enemy.* The enmity is often the more rancorous because of the intimacy of a former friendship. The secrets confided in a moment of familiarity are used against us with a studied ingenuity of irritating spitefulness. It is a painful shock to an unsophisticated youth, and leaves a wound that time cannot heal, when he discovers for the first time the base treachery of a pretended friend.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Mutual sympathy in sorrow. When Henry VII. heard of the sudden death of his son Prince Arthur at Ludlow Castle in 1502, he said, "Send some one for the Queen; let me bear this grief with her." She came and did her best to comfort him. She then retired to her own room, was overwhelmed with sorrow, and swooned away. It was now his turn to cheer and comfort. On both sides it was, "Let me bear this grief with her," and, "Let me bear this grief with him." And thus in their retreat at Greenwich the King and Queen of England mourned in silence for the loss of their first-born son.

—It is the weeping cloud that blesses the earth.

Grief useless that does not lead to active help. We are sorry (for the English are a kind-hearted people) for the victims of our luxury and neglect; sorry for the thousands whom we let die every year by preventable diseases, because we are either too busy or too

comfortable to save their lives; sorry for the savages whom we exterminate by no deliberate intent, but by the mere weight of our heavy footstep; sorry for the thousands who are used up yearly in certain trades in ministering to our comfort, even to our very luxuries and frivolities; sorry for the Sheffield grinders, who go to work as to certain death; sorry for the people whose lower jaws decay away in lucifer-match factories; sorry for the diseases of artificial flower-makers; sorry for the boys working in glass-houses whole days and nights on end without rest, "labouring in the very fire, and wearying themselves with weary vanity." We are sorry for them all, as the giant is for the worm on which he treads. Alas! poor worm. But the giant must walk on. He is necessary to the universe, and the worm is not. So we are sorry, for half an hour, and glad too (for we are a kind-hearted people) to hear that charitable persons or the Government are going to do something towards alleviating these miseries. And then we return, too many of us, each to his own ambition, comforting ourselves with the thought that we did not make the world, and we are not responsible for it.—*C. Kingsley.*

The All-seeing God and the lonely. God sees you always. There is no moment when He does not see you, night or day, waking or sleeping, alone or in company. It is told of Linnæus, the famous naturalist, that he was greatly impressed with this thought, and that it told upon his conversation, his writings, and his conduct. He felt the importance of this so much, that he wrote over the door of his study the Latin words, *Innocui vivite; Numen ad est.* "Live innocently; God is here!"

Christianity relieves the miseries of great cities. Look at those noble buildings which the generosity of our fellow-countrymen have erected in all our great cities. You may truly find in them sermons in stones; sermons for rich and poor alike. They preach to the rich, these hospitals, that the sick-bed levels all alike; that they are the equals and brothers of the poor in

the terrible liability to suffer. They preach to the poor that they are, through Christianity, the equals of the rich in their means and opportunities of cure. Whether the founders so intended or not, these hospitals bear direct witness for Christ. They do this, and would do it even if—which God forbid!—the name of Christ was never mentioned within their walls. That may seem a paradox, but it is none; for it is a historic fact that hospitals are the creation of Christian times and of Christian men. The heathen knew them not. In the great city of ancient Rome, as far as I have been able to discover, there was not a single hospital, not even a single charitable institution. Fearful thought! A city of a million and a half inhabitants, the centre of human civilisation, and not an hospital there! The Roman Dives paid his physician; the Roman Lazarus literally lay at his gates full of sores, till he died the death of the street dogs which licked those sores, and was carried forth to be thrust under ground awhile, till the same dogs came to quarrel over his bones. The misery and helplessness of the lower classes in the great city of the Roman Empire, till the Church of Christ arose literally with healing in its wings, cannot, I believe, be exaggerated.—*C. Kingsley.*

—When you hear a man praising “the good old times,” ask him how the peasantry were then sheltered and fed.

The power of tears. A young lady once visited a lunatic asylum, and was led into a room where there was but one patient, a young girl of the same age as herself. She was standing in the corner of the room, her face almost touching the wall. In stony hopelessness she stood. She neither looked nor spoke. She might have been dead but

that she still stood on. It was a pathetic sight. “Will you speak to her?” asked the doctor; “we can do nothing with her. She has been thus for days; but one like yourself might move her.” The young lady stepped forward, and, with an upward cry for Divine help, laid her hand gently on the shoulder of the listless form, and with tears in her eyes spoke one sentence of yearning sympathy and compassion. The spell was broken. The poor patient turned, gazed for a moment on the face of the weeping visitor, and then burst into tears! The doctor exclaimed, “Thank God, she may now be saved!” The visitor could never recall the words she had used; but, with the voice softened with tears, they had done their work. The still and cold indifference of the patient gave way before the warmth of a pitying heart and the magic touch of a hand stretched out to help. The eloquence of tears is irresistible.

The friends of youth: Where are they?

“I sought you, friends of youth, in sun and shade,

By home and hearth; but no! ye were not there.

Where are ye gone, beloved ones, where?

I said,

I listened, and an echo answered, Where?

Then silence fell around: upon a tomb

I sat me down, dismayed at death, and wept;

Over my senses fell a cloud of gloom;

They sank before the mystery, and I slept.

I slept, and then before my eyes there pressed

Faces that showed a bliss unknown before;

The loved whom I in life had once possessed

Came one by one, till all were there once more.

A light of nobler worlds was round their head;

A glow of better actions made them fair.

‘The dead are there,’ triumphantly I said;

Triumphantly the echo answered, ‘There!’

—*Oliver.*

HOMILETICS.

THE JUDGMENT OF OPPRESSION.

(Verse 3.)

I. The oppressor is in turn oppressed. “Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction and because of great servitude.” The prophet would probably have

in view the circumstances narrated in Jer. xxxiv., where the Jewish princes and people were threatened with captivity, because, in violation of the law, they withdrew the grant of liberty made to their servants, and reduced them to their former servitude, aggravated with increased exactions. It is an oft-repeated charge against the Jews that they robbed and oppressed their own countrymen; and the day came when they were robbed and oppressed by their powerful conquerors. It is a cruel abuse of power when it is used to injure the helpless. Every act of wrongdoing carries within it the germ of future recompense. The boomerang rebounds towards the man who threw it.

II. The judgment is constant. "She dwelleth among the heathen; she findeth no rest." The endless and impossible tasks imposed on others are now allotted to the oppressors. There is no prospect of release—they *dwell* among the heathen; no prospect of abatement—they find no rest. Judgment knows nothing of pity: while the sinner remains obdurate, its mission is to punish. There is no change in the punishment until there is a moral change in the offender. Divine mercy alone can break the entail of suffering, and that can be effected only by satisfying the claims of justice.

III. The judgment cannot be evaded by flight. "All her persecutors overtook her between the straits." Zedekiah and the princes of Judah strove to escape from besieged Jerusalem, but the wary Chaldeans pursued and captured them (Jer. lii. 7, 8). The people fled to the mountain passes, but they were there confronted by the enemy, and flight was impossible. Like hunted deer, whichever way they turned, they found themselves within the toils of the invaders. The conquerors held them as in a grip of steel. The day came when the Chaldeans were similarly helpless in the hands of a superior force. Judgment perpetually dogs the heel of the oppressor, and every possible avenue of escape is carefully guarded. Oppression is the attempt of an imperious will to have its own way, and it does not answer. "Not thy will but mine be done," changed Paradise into a desert. "Not My will but Thine be done," changed the desert into Paradise, and made Gethsemane the gate of glory.

LESSONS.—1. *Oppression is a short-sighted policy.* 2. *The spoils gained by oppression are worthless.* 3. *The law of retribution is always at work.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 3. "Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction and great servitude."

A time of trouble. 1. Should induce careful self-examination. 2. Should lead us to reflect whether we have caused trouble to others. 3. Is a call to repentance and moral reform.

— "She dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest." **The changes of life.** 1. Often bring us into the midst of strange, unfriendly associations. 2. Interfere with growth in personal piety. 3. Disturb the soul's peace.

— "All her persecutors overtook her between the straits." **The spirit of persecution.** 1. Instigated by hatred to the good. 2. Is vigilant and active in its cruel pursuits. 3. Takes advantage of the helplessness of its victims.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—The oppressor punished. There is an Eastern fable that a wicked and oppressive king was once kissed on either shoulder by the Evil One. Immediately there sprang therefrom two serpents, who, furious with hunger, attacked the man and strove to eat into his brain. The terrified king tried to tear them away and cast them from him, when, to his horror, he found they had become part of himself. So is it with those who yield to anger or any other evil passion. The man who tyrannises over others becomes by and by the victim of his own tyrannical temper, and all efforts to deliver himself are in vain; it has become a part of himself. Wrong-doing carries with it its own punishment. In its earlier

stages we fancy it will be easy at any time to do right; but when we try, we are helpless.

The oppressor a selfish man.

"He pours no cordial in the wounds of pain;
Unlocks no prison, and unclasps no chain.
His heart is like the rock, where sun nor dew
Can rear one plant, or flower of heavenly hue.
No thought of mercy there may have its birth,
For helpless misery or suffering worth.
The end of all his life is paltry pelf,
And all his thoughts are centred on himself.
The wretch of both worlds; for so mean a sum,
First starved in this, then damned in that to come!"

A time of trouble. If God brings us into difficulties, we may be sure He will bring us out again; but no such confidence should be ours if we bring ourselves into them.

Trouble and the way out. An expedition started from Buenos Ayres to explore the Pilcomayo River, South America, with the view of establishing a water communication between the Argentine Republic and Bolivia. For the first fortnight the explorers made fair progress, but after that the navigation was difficult and slow, it being necessary to construct dams across the river below their vessel and wait till the water accumulated sufficiently to float it. At length they could proceed no farther, and remained in the same position for months. Having exhausted all their provisions, and their efforts at foraging proving unsuccessful, they daily expected the arrival of a relief party, and were daily disappointed. When they were wasting with famine and had given up all hope, they were surprised one morning by hearing a bugle blast, and knew they were saved. Only those who have been in extremity can realise how exquisite is the joy of sudden and unexpected rescue.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

The changes of life. A mill-owner was obliged to dismiss several of his hands. Among them was a man whose faith and trust in God always led him to say, "The Lord will provide." One day when he had eaten his last morsel of food, and his faith was tried to the utmost, some street-boys, opening his door, flung in a dead raven, shouting

mockingly, "The Lord will provide." He quietly took up the dead bird and tenderly stroked its plumage. Suddenly he felt something hard in the crop of the bird, and wondering what it was, he took a knife and opened it. To his amazement he found there a gold chain. He felt here was God providing for him and his family. He went straight to a jeweller, telling his story, and asked if he would buy it. The jeweller saw it to be a chain of great value, with initials on it, and said, "If you could learn the name of the owner, would you return it?" "Certainly," replied the workman. "Well then," said the jeweller, "it belongs to your late master." Hearing that, the man set off without delay and put the chain into his master's hands, who received it with great joy, as he had on missing it accused one of his servants of theft. Greatly struck with his workman's honesty, he told him he wished him to return to his employment, as he could not part with so honest a man. In the most trying changes of life it is best to do what is right.

Persecution. A sensation was caused in Hungary by a certain Count, a large landed proprietor, giving orders that thenceforth no Protestant was to be engaged in the service of his estate, and that Protestants already employed were disqualified from any further promotion. Any officials who married Protestants were to be at once dismissed. This high-handed procedure was the more remarkable as religious toleration was recognised as a supreme political and social principle, there being already eight different Christian denominations. Persecution and bigotry are weeds difficult to eradicate, and there is no knowing into what eccentric and tyrannical forms they may develop.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

God the Helper of the persecuted. Have faith, O you who suffer for the noble cause, the apostles of a truth which the world of to-day comprehends not, warriors in the sacred fight whom it yet stigmatises with the name of rebels. To-morrow victory will bless the banner of your crusade. Walk in

faith and fear not. That which Christ has done, humanity may do. Believe, and you will conquer. Action is the word of God; thought alone is but His shadow. They who disjoin thought and action seek to divide Deity, and deny the Eternal unity. They who are not ready to bear witness to their faith with their blood are no true believers. From your cross of sorrow and persecution proclaim the religion of the epoch. Soon shall it receive the consecration of faith. From our cross of misery and persecution we men of exile, the representatives of heart and faith of the enslaved races, of millions of men constrained to silence, will respond to your appeal, and say to our brothers, *The alliance is founded*. Answer your persecutors with the formula, *God and the people*. They may rebel and blaspheme against it for a while, but it will be accepted and worshipped by the peoples.—*Mazzini*.

The spirit of persecution inexorable. A poor Anabaptist, guilty of no crime but his fellowship with a persecuted sect, had been condemned to death. He had made his escape, closely pur-

sued by an officer of justice, across a frozen lake. It was late in the winter, and the ice had become unsound. It trembled and cracked beneath his footsteps, but he reached the shore in safety. The officer was not so fortunate. The ice gave way beneath him, and he sank into the lake uttering a cry for succour. There were none to hear him except the fugitive whom he had been hunting. Dirk Willemzoon, for so was the Anabaptist called, instinctively obeyed the dictates of a generous nature, returned, crossed the quaking and dangerous ice at the peril of his life, extended his hand to the enemy, and saved him from certain death. Unfortunately for human nature, it cannot be added that the generosity of the action was met by a corresponding heroism. The officer was desirous, it is true, of avoiding the responsibility of sacrificing the preserver of his life, but the burgomaster of Asperen sternly reminded him to remember his oath. He accordingly arrested the fugitive, who, in the month of May following, was burned to death under the most lingering tortures.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

HOMILETICS.

LAMENTATION OVER A FORSAKEN SANCTUARY.

(Verse 4.)

I. Because its thoroughfares are no longer thronged with worshippers. "The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts; all her gates are desolate." Those were happy days when the roads leading up to Jerusalem were crowded with eager worshippers, coming to the three great annual festivals—the Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Tabernacles. The city was jubilant in song, and full to overflowing with life and movement. Now the very roads are represented as mourning, as if they missed the tread of the pilgrims' feet; and the gates look in vain for the travellers they had so often welcomed. "All her gates are desolate."

It is a dispiriting spectacle to see a closed sanctuary, with weeds and grasses growing about the entrance; the more so when we have seen the same sanctuary filled with delighted worshippers. When men forsake the house of God, God forsakes it too, and it is then desolate indeed.

II. Because the office of the ministry is obsolete. "Her priests sigh"—sigh not only for want of bread, because the offerings, which were their means of livelihood, fail; but because their life-work is useless, because the people lapse into ignorance and sin, because the worship of Jehovah is neglected and dishonoured. The true minister is wholly consecrated to his sacred calling; it is the theme of his earnest prayers, his constant study, and exercises his best powers.

Life to him is bereft of its holiest motive, its sweetest relish, when it is balked of its loftiest purpose. "It is time to sigh when the priests, the Lord's ministers, sigh."

III. Because the training of the young is neglected. "Her virgins are afflicted." The virgins are mentioned because they took a prominent part in all religious festivals (Jer. xxxi. 13; Exod. xv. 20; Ps. lxxviii. 25); and therefore special notice is taken of the educative loss to them occasioned by disused ordinances. Neglect in the religious training of the young means grave peril to the moral stamina of the community. Religion is the mightiest force in the formation of youthful character. The men and women of the future will be what the Church makes them in their younger years. It has been said—"People fancy that we cannot become wise without becoming old also; but in truth, as years accumulate, it is hard to keep as wise as we were. Man becomes, in the different stages of his life, a different being, but he cannot say that he will surely be better as he grows onwards. In certain matters he is as likely to be right in his twentieth as in his sixtieth year." The young will carry with them through life the influences for good or evil that have been brought to bear upon them in their early days.

IV. Because the city is deprived of religious ordinances. "And she is in bitterness." It is a beautiful and touching conception to impersonate the metropolis of Judah as a disconsolate female, troubled with the evident cessation of Divine worship and the universal neglect of religious duties. As is the Church, so will be the city; as is the state of religion, so will be the people. The glory of a city is gone when religious ordinances are abandoned. No loss should be lamented more bitterly than the loss of religion.

LESSONS.—1. *A closed temple anywhere is a pitiable sight.* 2. *Where religious privileges are withdrawn the people suffer.* 3. *Love of worship will always crowd the sanctuary.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 4. "Her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted." **A dispirited ministry.** 1. Because the sanctuary is destroyed. 2. Because the worshippers are scattered and uncared for. 3. Because its maintenance is withdrawn. 4. Because the joyous song of the young is turned to sorrow. "Her virgins are afflicted." 5. Because of conscious imperfections and unfaithfulness.

—"She is in bitterness." **A city in sorrow.** 1. Because its reputation is dishonoured. 2. Because its resources are crippled, its people dispersed, its commerce interrupted, its institutions destroyed. 3. Because the public worship of God is abandoned. 4. Because its future seems hopeless.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Dead and dying Churches.** A barque on her voyage from Hong-Kong fell in with a British ship, the "Guiding Star," helplessly floating about with a fever-stricken

crew. When found, only one member of the crew was able to work. The captain, the first mate, the steward, and a seaman had died. Five men were lying helpless, though still alive, and the boatswain had gone mad from the want of proper attention. The "Guiding Star" was towed to Batavia, where the survivors were placed under medical treatment. Are there not Churches to-day that are morally in a similar plight—drifting hospitals, officered with the dead and dying? It will be a mercy if they are spiritually rescued before they become sepulchres, entombing the hopelessly dead.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

The true man superior to his surroundings.—The scientist, while admitting the influence of geographical surroundings in shaping the history and character of nations, admits that nothing would be more erroneous than to suppose that Nature alone acts in determin-

ing the conditions of life and of races. Man's activity must be associated with Nature. A country may be prominent and fertile, and yet occupied by a race of men utterly unfit to develop its resources. After all, man is greater than Nature, and it is his lofty mission to subdue it. The energy of the Netherlands turned a swamp into a garden, while their Spanish oppressors, with inexhaustible resources in soil and mineral, sank into decay. We are apt to lay too much stress upon the operation of the law of environment, and to ignore individual responsibility. Plant within man the vital principles of Christianity, and he will soon change his environment.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

Ministers not only finger-posts, but guides. There ought to be no hiatus between our declarations and our spiritual conduct. We must not only be finger-posts, but guides, "Lest having preached to others, we ourselves become castaways."

"The love of Christ and His Apostles twelve
He taught, but first he followed it himself."

If we are the channels of good to our fellows, it behoves us to clear away all that might impede the flowing, and defile the purity, of the stream of truth from God.

Youth needs instruction. Narcissus, a beautiful youth, though he would not love them that loved him, yet afterwards fell in love with his own shadow. Ah! how many young men in these days, who were once lovely and hopeful, are now fallen in love with their own and others' shadows, with high, empty, airy notions, and with strange, monstrous speculations, to their own damnation. A youth deprived of instruction and left to his natural development is a pitiable object, and is menaced by many perils.

Work a remedy for misery. Nothing is more remarkable in the Apostles than their unbroken mental health. The histories of religious communities are full of instances of ecstasies and hysterical delusions; but never do we find among our Lord's followers anything approaching to a spiritual craze. This

health of theirs came in great measure from their being constantly employed about matters of which their hearts were full. The busy man has neither time nor inclination to nurse delusive fancies. Hard, honest, practical work is a panacea for many ills. Underneath a fresco of the 13th century discovered at Cortona, in Italy, is inscribed the motto, *Sum misero nisi teneam lignem*—I am miserable unless I hold a spade.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

The uses of suffering.

"Through long days did Anguish,
And sad nights did Pain
Forge my shield, Endurance,
Bright and free from stain.

Doubt in misty caverns,
'Mid dark horrors sought,
Till my peerless jewel,
Faith, to me she brought.

Sorrow that I wearied
Should remain so long,
Wreathed my starry glory,
The bright crown of song.

Strife, that racked my spirit
Without hope or rest,
Left the blooming flower,
Patience, in my breast."

—Proctor.

Love in sorrow. Always through the darkest part of every life there runs, though we may sometimes fail to see it, the golden thread of love, so that even the worst man on earth is not wholly cut off from God, since He will, by some means or other, eternally try to draw him out of death into life. We are astounded now and then to read that some cold-blooded murderer, some man guilty of a hideous crime, will ask in his last moments to see a child who loved him devotedly, and whom he also loved. We are astonished just because we do not understand the untiring heart of the Almighty Father, who in His goodness often gives to the vilest sinner the love of a pure-hearted woman or child. So true is the beautiful old Latin saying, *Mergere nos patitur, sed non submergere Christus*—Christ lets us sink, may be, but not drown.—*Edna Lyall*.

A city in sorrow. In 1576 Antwerp was stormed by the Spaniards with fire and sword. Never was there a more

monstrous massacre, even in the blood-stained annals of the Netherlands. In the course of three days eight thousand human beings were murdered. The Spaniards seemed to cast off even the vizard of humanity. Hell seemed emptied of its fiends. Night fell upon the scene before the soldiers were masters of the city; but worse horrors began after the contest was ended. This army of brigands had come thither with a definite, practical purpose, for it was not blood thirst, nor lust, nor revenge which impelled them, but greediness for gold. Torture was employed

to discover hidden treasure; and, after all had been given, if the sum seemed too little, the proprietors were brutally punished for their poverty or their supposed dissimulation. Women, children, and old men were killed in countless numbers, and still, through all this havoc, directly over the heads of the struggling throng, suspended in mid-air above the din and smoke of the conflict, there sounded, every half-quarter of every hour, as if in gentle mockery, from the belfry of the cathedral, the tender and melodious chimes.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

HOMILETICS.

THE TANTALISING INDIFFERENCE OF THE ENEMIES OF THE CHURCH.

(Verses 5-7.)

I. They contentedly enjoy the fruits of their conquest. "Her adversaries are the chief; her enemies prosper." *Her foes have become her masters; her enemies enjoy quiet prosperity*—*Geikie* (ver. 5). Judea has become so utterly crushed that her conquerors revel in their spoils without fear of resistance, or any attempt at reprisals on the part of the vanquished. If we allow our vices to become our masters, we have the chagrin of seeing them rioting in indulgence while we are powerless to interpose.

II. They have no concern to know the cause of the Church's calamities. "For the Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions" (ver. 5). What of that? It is no concern of theirs to pry into moral causes. The invaders wish to strike a blow at imperious Egypt. Judah stands in the way, and, becoming troublesome, must be crushed. They knew not, nor did they care to know, that they were but instruments in the hands of a Higher Power to punish a nation for its sins. It was brought home to Judah that her disasters were provoked by her manifold transgressions, and it was an aggravation of her sufferings that her enemies were utterly regardless and apparently ignorant of all this. Had they understood it, they might have shown more pity.

III. They are indifferent to the sufferings they inflict. "Her children are gone into captivity. Her princes have become like harts . . . without strength before the pursuer" (vers. 5, 6). The young children are driven before the adversary, not as a flock of lambs which follow the shepherd, but for sale as slaves. The princes are hunted down to exhaustion. In the ancient sculptures nothing is more affecting than the mournful processions so often depicted of tender women and young children driven in gangs as captives before their heartless conquerors. In olden times the treatment of prisoners of war was characterised by the most brutal cruelty. They were regarded as an encumbrance, and were often butchered wholesale to save further trouble. They were subjected to degradations from which death would have been a merciful relief.

IV. They make no allowance for the feelings of the conquered regarding their losses. "From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed. Jerusalem remembered all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old" (vers. 6, 7). In the midst of her distress Jerusalem remembered the happiness of former days,

when the Temple stood out in all the beauty of its architecture, and as the symbol of holiest worship; when the throne was the centre of imperial power and magnificence; when the land was prosperous, and the people united and content. Now the Temple is shattered past recognition, the most distinguished citizens are in exile, the land is desolate, and the people plunged in misery. But all this is nothing to her enemies; they heed not what their victims have lost; they are more interested in what their conquests have gained.

V. **They make sport of the Church's utter discomfiture.** "The adversaries saw her, and did mock at her Sabbaths," *her calamities, her ruined circumstances* (*Getkie; Henderson*). The more literal meaning is her *Sabbatisms*. Foreigners ridiculed the custom of the Jews in ceasing from labour every seventh day, and attributed their ruin to what appeared to them a strange, fanatical practice. Oh, had those Sabbaths been as faithfully observed in spirit as they were in form, how different would have been the career of Judah! The Church is familiar with the scoffs of unbelievers. While she is true to God, they are powerless to harm. It is when she is conscious of unfaithfulness that they begin to irritate.

LESSONS.—1. *It is a hard time for the Church when her enemies triumph.* 2. *God is the refuge of the Church in time of trouble. He is never indifferent to her sufferings.* 3. *The Church should learn to make the best of prosperous times.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 5. "Her adversaries are the chief; her enemies prosper." **New masters:** 1. Soon make evident their newly-acquired superiority. 2. Rule with severity when actuated by a spirit of enmity. 3. Enjoy without compunction the prosperity secured by the ruin of others.

— "The Lord afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions." **Sin:** 1. Is a transgression of the law of God. 2. Has a tendency to multiply itself. 3. Is a prolific source of trouble. 4. Is punished by the Being against whom it is committed.

Vers. 5, 6. **National disaster.** I. *Involves the suffering of innocent children.* "Her children are gone into captivity before the enemy" (ver. 5). II. *Quenches the splendour of its reputation.* "From the daughter of Zion all her beauty is departed" (ver. 6). III. *Degrades and harasses its most illustrious rulers.* "Her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they are gone without strength before the pursuer" (ver. 6).

Ver. 7. **Sad memories.** 1. When contrasting present miseries with former joys. 2. When reflecting on the suddenness and completeness of our calamities. 3. When mingled with the

heartless mockery of the authors of our misfortunes.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Lessons from the world's treatment.** Three men are my friends, He that loves me, he that hates me, and he that is indifferent to me. Who loves me teaches me tenderness; who hates me teaches me caution; who is indifferent to me teaches me self-reliance.

Loose talk leads to loose conduct. Indulgence in verbal vices soon encourages corresponding vices in conduct. Let any one talk about any mean or vile practice with familiar tone, and do you suppose, when the opportunity occurs for committing the mean or vile act, he will be as strong against it as before? It is by no means an unknown thing that men of correct lives talk themselves into sensuality, crime, and perdition. Bad language easily runs into bad deeds. Select any iniquity you please, suffer yourself to converse in its dialect, to use its slang, to speak in the character of one who relishes it, and I need not tell you how soon your moral sense will lower down to its level. Becoming intimate with it, you lose your horror of it. To be too much with bad men and in bad places is not only

unwholesome to man's morality, but unfavourable to his faith and trust in God. It is not every man who could live as Lot did in Sodom, and then be fit to go out of it under God's convoy.—*The Christian Commonwealth.*

New masters: Tyranny not permanent. By the volcanic eruption among the Tonga group in 1885, a new island was formed. When it was visited a few years after, the soil below the surface was still hot, the temperature at a depth of seven feet being 100° Fahr., while at the surface it was only 74°. With the exception of two young cocoa-nut trees, which seemed not very hardy, there was no vegetation but a few bunches of grass, and a moth and small sandpiper constituted the animal population. It is thought the island will disappear in a few years, as the waves are rapidly wearing the shore-line away. Such has been the history of many a vaunted human tyranny. Its policy was inaugurated with noise and heat, and threatened to revolutionise the existing order. But when it had spent its force and cooled down, it revealed its barrenness, and, worn away with the ever-active waves of time, it at length disappeared.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Sin a poison. What poison one fang of the old serpent will throw into our moral system! Look around and see how many have been poisoned with the desire for strong drink, with lust, with avarice, with pride, with anger, with unbelief. Fiery serpents are among us, and many die of their venom. If we tolerate the least sin, it is a burning drop in the veins of the soul. One touch of the fangs of this serpent will work immeasurable sorrow, even if the soul be saved from death. It is only the power of God that keeps us from being destroyed by this viper. Had he his will, he is a spirit so malignant that no heir of heaven would survive. O God, keep Thine own! Deliver us from the evil one!—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

Sin defies law. A woman named Guerin, in a rage of jealousy, murdered her unfaithful husband. Going to a villa where she learnt he was living

with another woman, she stood at the door and called his name. Hearing her voice, he went out to speak to her, and had scarcely crossed the threshold when she stabbed him in the abdomen. He staggered back into the house, and after a few minutes crawled to the window and said in a feeble voice, "Kiss our child, for all is over." The recital of this incident in the court in Paris, told as a woman could tell it, and she a principal actor in the scene, and the evidence adduced that Madame Guerin had borne an irreproachable character and was an excellent mother, so moved the jury that they acquitted her without a moment's hesitation, amid a storm of applause from the public in court. A gush of sentiment disarmed the rigour of the law and choked the voice of vengeance. One wrong does not justify another. But sin defies law and justice, and spreads confusion wherever it reigns.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Avoid the example of the bad. I would desire all young men often to remember the saying of Lactantius, "He who imitates the bad cannot be good." Young men, in these professing times, stand between good and bad examples, as Hercules in his dream stood between virtue and vice, solicited by both. Choose you must who to follow. Oh, that you were all so wise as to follow the best! Life, heaven, happiness, eternity, hang upon it.

Sad memories. A small boat was picked up one morning on the north shore at Troon. It had the appearance of having broken away from a vessel during a great gale in the Clyde. It is a dangerous moment when a young man breaks away from the happy associations of his early life, whether in church or home. Chafing under restraint, he plunges heedlessly into the wide world in search of a larger liberty. Unaccustomed to self-control, he is swayed by every varying current, drifts out to sea, and is ultimately picked up a partial wreck on some far-off shore. Then it is that he is tormented with painful memories; he sees his folly, and laments his reckless severance from

the moral restrictions of a happier time. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

Memory and music. Music touches every key of memory, and stirs all the hidden springs of sorrow and joy. We love it for what it makes us forget, and for what it makes us remember.

Beware of melancholy. Never give way to melancholy; resist it steadily, for the habit will encroach. A lady was once given two-and-twenty recipes

against melancholy. One was a bright fire, another to remember all the pleasant things said to her, another to keep a box of plums on the mantelpiece and a kettle simmering on the hob. She thought this mere trifling at the moment, but did in after life discover how true it is that these little pleasures often banish melancholy better than higher and more exalted objects, and that no means ought to be thought too trifling which can oppose it either in ourselves or others

HOMILETICS.

THE TERRIBLE HAVOC OF SIN.

(Verses 8–11.)

I. In its revolting defilement. "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned, therefore she is removed. Her filthiness is in her skirts" (vers. 8, 9). The expression "grievously sinned" gives the idea of persistent continuance in wickedness. This condition is not reached all at once. It began in trifling with the first enticements to evil. The entrance to the pathway of sin is gaily decked with flowers, but they are flowers that wither as soon as they are plucked. It is overhung with tempting fruits, but they are fruits that turn to bitter ashes between the teeth. It is sprinkled with subtle and delicious perfumes, but they are perfumes that distil the poison of the deadliest drug. The air around palpitates with strains of bewitching music, but it is music that lures its charmed victim down the dizzy slopes of irreparable ruin. The allurements may be presented in the shape of a book, a picture, or a whispered word, that suggests more of evil than it actually expresses, and the soul is blotted with a moral stain that rivers of tears cannot wash away. Every act of sin increases the defilement, and it becomes the more exposed.

II. In sinking the soul to a state of abject degradation. "Therefore she came down wonderfully; she had no comfort" (ver. 9). You have seen the little snowflakes flutter about the railway track like lovely bits of down shook from angelic wings, and you have seen with what ease the proud locomotive scatters the fleecy morsels in the early stages of the storm; but the falling atoms increase with such rapidity and accumulative force, that the panting engine is at length completely mastered, and, utterly exhausted, lies buried fathoms deep beneath the crystal drift. So in the early stages of transgression, the soul deems itself capable of throwing off every little temptation that beguiles, and, when it is too late, discovers itself so completely bound in their toils that all efforts to escape are ineffectual. 1. *Sin dishonours the soul in the estimation of others.* "All that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness" (ver. 8). The first step downwards is to sink in the estimation of others. Their commendation sustained us and helped us to keep up to a certain standard of conduct. Others may see the tendency of our sins before we see it ourselves. When others show their disapproval and despise us for our folly, it is time to pause and reflect. 2. *Sin dishonours the soul in its own estimation.* "Yea, she sigheth and turneth backward" (ver. 8). It is a lower depth when a man sinks in his own estimation, when he cannot courageously confront others, or even face up his better self. Sin saps the strength of our manhood. To be conscious of

sin and ashamed of it are the first hopeful signs of repentance; but if the repentance is not prompt and genuine, the soul is in danger of becoming more thoroughly demoralised. Such a critical moment comes in most men's lives (Ps. lxxiii. 2).

III. **In rendering the soul reckless as to consequences.** "She remembereth not her last end"—had not thought of the sure end of her sins (ver. 9). The down grade is steep, and every step increases the momentum of the terrible descent. One sin leads to another, and that to another in darker and deeper gradations, until the light of hope is quenched, and the helpless victim gropes about aimlessly in the ever-deepening gloom of despair. The soul is now and then haunted with the shadow of a coming reckoning day; but it seems a great way off, and may never come. The reckoning day does come.

IV. **In its desecration of sacred things** (ver. 10). Even the Jew was prohibited from entering the innermost sanctuary, and now the prophet laments that the heathen conquerors force their way into the holy place and plunder Jehovah's Temple, that they may adorn with its sacred vessels the shrines of their false deities. It was desecration to enter the sanctuary, and high sacrilege to rob it of its "pleasant things." Sin knows no respect of persons or places. It obtrudes with shameless effrontery into the holiest place, and is callous as to the havoc it works.

V. **In reducing a people to distress and want.** "All her people sigh; they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul" (ver. 11). Famine follows in the train of war. A siege lasting a year and a half exhausted the surrounding country, and the Chaldean army would have difficulty in supplying its own commissariat. In the hope that the present scarcity will pass away, the people dispose of the wealth and precious jewels that remain to them for the merest trifles of food. Sin is the prolific cause of war, famine, and the acutest forms of personal and national suffering. Money is valueless when it can purchase nothing in exchange—it cannot prolong the life of the starving. The best things are capable of the worst abuse. The very abuse may test the value.

VI. **Compels the soul to appeal to the Divine compassion.** "O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy hath magnified himself" (ver. 9). "See, O Lord, and consider, for I am become vile." I am despised (ver. 11). It is not our vileness that can form a ground of appeal to the Divine consideration, but the abject misery into which our vileness has brought us. God does not pity our sins, but He does pity the distress they occasion, though that distress is the direct result of our obstinate violation of His laws and disregard of His repeated warnings. Suffering is a severe teacher. It is a mercy when the eyes of the sinner are at length opened, and, seeing that his sins are the cause of his trouble, he cries to God for help. Long and patiently does God wait for such a cry; and then with what gracious speed does He hasten to our rescue!

LESSONS.—1. *Sin demoralises wherever it reigns.* 2. *Is the occasion of unspeakable suffering.* 3. *Can be cured only by Divine remedies.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 8. "She sigheth and turneth backward." **Conscious sin:** 1. A painful humiliation. 2. The first step in genuine repentance. 3. Should induce the soul to seek immediate deliverance.

Ver. 9. "She remembereth not her last end." **The course of sin:** 1. De-

lusive in its beginning. 2. Hardens the transgressor into reckless indifference. 3. Is certain to end in ruin.

— **Sin an implacable foe.** I. *Drags down the soul to comfortless depths.* "Wherefore she came down wonderfully; she had no comforter." II. *Exults over the misery of its victims.*

"The enemy hath magnified himself."
See how proudly the foe deals with me
 (Geikie). III. *Convinces the soul that*
its only resource is in the Divine pity.
 "O Lord, behold my affliction."

Ver. 10. **Heathenism a moral obliquity.** I. *Sees no sin in theft.* "The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things." II. *Has no scruples in desecrating the holiest place.* "The heathen entered into her sanctuary." III. *Disregards the Divine laws.* "Thou didst command that they should not enter into Thy congregation."

Ver. 11. **The extremities of famine.** I. *A sorrowful craving for food.* "All her people sigh; they seek bread." II. *Desperate efforts made to retain life.* "To relieve the soul"—to keep them alive. III. *The dearest treasures readily sacrificed.* "They have given their pleasant things for meat."

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Sin the danger of great cities. The spiritual destitution of London is something appalling. There are 10,000 prostitutes—a procession a mile long, walking double file—all somebody's daughters. There are 20,000 thieves—two miles more of that dread procession, and there are 100,000 uncared for children, making the procession ten miles in length. These are what John Bright called the residuum, and Dr. Chalmers the lapsed classes. In their abodes every breath is poison; they are so crowded together that morality is impossible. Such a glimpse of spiritual destitution ought to arouse the heart, not only of every Christian, but of every patriot.

Sin stupifies. Oh, how difficult it is to awake some men to a sense of danger or duty. Happening to be lounging in the market-place of a little seaport town in France, I saw with some surprise several men in a *café* inhaling the fumes of opium through a tobacco-pipe. By-and-by the wife of one of these men called for her husband to return home in their little market-cart. But he, being in a poisoned slumber, was unconscious of her existence, and oblivious of things about him. She lifted him

up and shook him, but he would not awake till the honied-trance stupor was ended. So some of us are steeped in the opium-lethargy of sin, and will not awake. It is not that we cannot; we will not.

Sin a disease. A minister once met a man in the street who was afflicted with heart-disease, and said he could not sleep, and that the doctor could do nothing for him. "Ah!" said the minister, "the worst form of heart-disease is sin. Yet people go about with the disease; they do not know it, and they sleep quite soundly. Now, it is my business to tell them how matters stand, and to try to disturb their sleep, for I can tell them of a physician who can cure them. Have you been to Christ with your sins?" The man was silent, but went away deeply impressed.

Sin and individuality. I remember as though it were yesterday the moment when the idea of individual identity dawned upon my boyish mind. The thought appalled me, for I had been looking at a wretched little beggar-boy with a crutch, a dirty face, and miserable rags for garments, and it had just occurred to me that he was not to himself merely an unpleasant object, to be sent away out of sight with some dole of pennies or broken fragments of food, but just the I that I was to myself, as precious, as important; and I grew cold from head to foot, and felt as though I must do something to alter it all. After all these years the horror abides with me yet. I do not know whether others feel it as keenly, but it is to me worse than any ghost could be to remember the wretched people of the world—the prisoners in their cells, convicts in their chains, men doomed to die upon the gallows at dawn, women who sell their souls for bread or jewels, beggars gnawing their crusts by the roadsides, sufferers whose every breath is agony, wives whose hearts are broken by the cruelty of the husbands who were once their lovers, men who are plotting murder and men who are committing it, lepers in the cities of lepers holding out their mouldering hands for alms as strangers flee by their gates. To re-

member these, and many, many more, wicked or accursed, crushed beneath loads of crime and sorrow too heavy to be borne, and to know when we clasp our hands or drop a tear, and say with a shudder, as we sometimes do, "And it might have been I: that it actually is I to some one!" It is a terrible thought, and yet we should not set it aside. Surely nothing could prompt us so strongly to do all we can for those who sin or suffer.

Sin a double defect. The verb used oftenest in the New Testament, *sin*, means literally to miss the mark. The corresponding nouns have, of course, similar meanings. The idea conveyed is deviation from a standard at which men ought to aim, and which they ought to reach. They may miss it by going beyond, as well as by falling short. The moral idea is the same as that of omission and transgression.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

The course of sin.

"We are not worst at once. The course of evil

Begins so slowly and from such slight source,
An infant's hand might stem its breach with clay;

But let the stream get deeper, and philosophy shall strive in vain
To turn the headlong current."

Sin a foe, but not invincible. It is said that the late Lord Ampthill, when on diplomatic service in Rome, possessed a boa-constrictor, and interested himself in watching its habits. One day the monster escaped from the box where he supposed it was asleep, quietly wound itself around his body, and began gradually to tighten its folds. His position became extremely perilous; but the consummate coolness and self-possession which had enabled him to win many a diplomatic triumph befriended him in this dangerous emergency. He remembered there was a bone in the throat of the serpent which, if he could find and break, he would save himself. He was aware that either he or the snake must perish. Not a moment must be lost in hesitation. He deliberately seized the head of the serpent, thrust his hand down its throat,

and smashed the vital bone. The coils were relaxed, the victim fell dead at his feet, and he was free! So in all wickedness there is weakness, and it is a grand thing to discern the vulnerable spot, and be ready with the exact truth, fact, or promise which deals death to the foe. This insight and power are given to all who prayerfully study God's Word.

Heathen worship a performance.

Marcus Varro, the great Roman antiquarian, wrote forty-one books on the Pagan cultus. He speaks of three orders of gods—the certain gods, the uncertain gods, and the chief and select gods. Referring to the worship offered to these various deities, he arranges his material under four divisions—who perform, where they perform, when they perform, what they perform. How true it is that, apart from genuine spiritual religion, all worship, and especially heathen worship, is but a scenic, pantomimic performance!

Light for heathen darkness. The simile "dark as a coal-pit" will soon lose its meaning and become obsolete. A colliery company has abolished the miner's lamp and lit up one of their pits with electric lamps, placed at intervals of fifteen yards apart. Indeed, the depths of earth and sea are now to be illuminated. One of the difficulties of the deep-sea diver has been the comparative darkness in which he has had to go about his work at the bottom of the ocean. Now a French engineer has constructed a lamp, supplied with petroleum, which burns as well under water as in the open air. By an ingenious contrivance it can be lighted at the bottom of the sea, and with the aid of its friendly light the diver is enabled to discover his greatest treasures. So the earnest missionary penetrates the dark depths of heathenism, holding the lamp of Divine truth, flaming with the burning love of the world's Redeemer, and picks up the most degraded victims of idolatry, who, penetrated and refined by the same Divine light that first found them out, shall shine with the lustre of the finest jewels.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

The horrors of famine. The besieged

city of Leyden was at its last gasp. Bread, malt-cake, horse-flesh, had entirely disappeared; dogs, cats, rats, and other vermin were esteemed luxuries. A small number of cows, kept as long as possible for their milk, still remained; but a few were killed from day to day, and distributed in minute proportions, hardly sufficient to support life among the famishing population. Starving wretches swarmed daily around the shambles where these cattle were slaughtered, contending for any morsel which might fall, and eagerly lapping the blood as it ran along the pavement, while the hides, chopped and boiled, were greedily devoured. Women and children all day long were seen searching gutters and dunghills for morsels of food which they disputed fiercely with the famishing dogs. The green leaves were stripped from the trees, every

living herb was converted into human food, but these expedients could not avert starvation. The daily mortality was frightful—infants starved to death on the maternal breasts which famine had parched and withered, mothers dropped dead in the streets with their dead children in their arms. A disorder called the plague, naturally engendered of hardship and famine, now came, as if in kindness, to abridge the agony of the people. The pestilence stalked at noonday through the city, and the doomed inhabitants fell like grass beneath its scythe. From six to eight thousand human beings sank before this scourge alone; yet the people resolutely held out, women and men mutually encouraging each other to resist the entrance of their foreign foe—an evil more horrible than pest or famine.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

HOMILETICS.

A DISTRESSED NATION.

(Verses 12-17.)

I. Utters a piteous appeal for sympathy. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow," &c. (ver. 12). Sorrow craves sympathy. A crumb, an atom, however trifling, is eagerly seized and fondly cherished. It matters not from what source it comes. It is welcome from any casual passer-by, from anybody, from anything. The despairing find comfort in a flower as it gracefully bends towards them; in the mute sympathy of a favourite dog, as it caressingly thrusts its nose into the limp hands. It is easy to exaggerate our troubles and imagine there is no sorrow like our own; but a wider knowledge of the world's ills helps us to correct our magnified estimate. There is only One—the world's Redeemer—whose sufferings are unique and unparalleled.

II. Painfully conscious of the overwhelming nature of its sufferings (ver. 13-15). **1. In their fierceness.** "From above hath He sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them"—subdues them (ver. 13). It is no earthly, but heavenly fire which burns in the bones of Jerusalem (*Speaker's Commentary*). It is a fact well established in osteology that inflammation in the bones is not only extremely painful, but dries them up and renders them brittle and useless (*Henderson*). **2. All attempts to escape from them are futile.** "He hath spread a net for my feet, He hath turned me back: He hath made me desolate and faint all the day" (ver. 13). Judea, like a hunted animal, endeavours to escape, but finds every outlet blocked with nets, and recoils from them in terror, and a sense of utter hopelessness and exhaustion. The only thing to flee from is sin; the only refuge to flee to is God. There is no relief from suffering till we are divested of the coils of our sin. **3. They are an unmistakable consequence of sin.** "The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand: they are wreathed and come up upon my neck," &c. (ver. 14). The metaphor is taken from agricultural life.

As the ploughman binds the yoke with cords so knotted and twined together that they form a bunch upon the neck of the oxen impossible to shake off, so does God compel Judah to bear the punishment of her sins. The yoke thus imposed by the hand of God, and securely knotted around the neck of Judah by the entangled bonds of her own sins, bows down her strength by its weight, and makes her totter and stumble beneath it. "He hath made my strength to fall"—to stumble (*Speaker's Commentary*). Sin by and by becomes an intolerable burden, and is constantly reasserting its power over us. There is a lake in Switzerland, shut in by high mountains, a solitary, lonely place, which few travellers visit, and where few care to linger, so desolate and homeless is the spot. Here, an old legend says, every night at midnight the watcher may see the ghost of Pilate come to the shore and try with piteous lamentations to wash from his hands some red stains that are upon them—the marks of the blood of Jesus. But as fast as he washes them off they reappear. So is it with all our sins, small and great. 4. *They are an evidence of contemptuous and crushing defeat.* "The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me," &c. (ver. 15). They had not fallen gloriously in the battlefield, but remained ignominiously in the city, confessing their inability to fight. Irving once said, "With every exertion, the best of men can do but a moderate amount of good, but it seems in the power of the most contemptible individual to do incalculable mischief." The governor-general of a Russian province was once mildly remonstrated with by his secretary regarding a high-handed proceeding, producing at the same time a paragraph from a state volume proving the illegality of the action. The angry governor seized the book and sat upon it, shouting, "Where is the law now?" He then pointed to his decorated breast, and continued in a pompous strain, "Here it is; I am the law!" and the secretary had to beat a prudent retreat. It is very humiliating to be in the grip of tyranny like this.

III. **The most passionate expression of sorrow brings no relief.** "For these things I weep, &c. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her," &c. (vers. 16, 17). Spreading out the hands is a token of the deepest distress. There is no one to comfort—not God, for He is chastening; nor man, for all the neighbouring nations have become enemies (ver. 2). Tears are a sign of weakness and helplessness. To give way to grief is not the way to conquer it. God is the only refuge in distress, and His help, if sincerely sought, is not in vain. The common cry of the Breton mariner is, "My God, protect me! my bark is so small and Thy ocean so vast."

"I am so weak, dear Lord, I cannot stand
One moment without Thee;
But oh! the tenderness of Thine enfolding;
And oh! the faithfulness of Thine upholding;
And oh! the strength of Thy right hand:
That strength is enough for me.
I am so needy, Lord, and yet I know
All fulness dwells in Thee;
And hour by hour that never-failing treasure
Supplies and fills, in overflowing measure,
My least, my greatest need; and so
Thy grace is enough for me."

LESSONS.—1. *It is painful to witness distress we are helpless to relieve.* 2. *National distress is the fruit of national crime.* 3. *National suffering should purify the national life.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 12. **The sufferings of the** classes of the human family. 2. **Unique** world's Redeemer: 1. Appeal to all in their character and purpose. 3.

Aggravated by the mysterious manifestation of the Divine wrath. 4. The basis of the world's salvation. 5. Should arrest the attention and engage the prayerful thought of the sinner.

— **Is it nothing to you?** I. *The sufferings of Christ upon the Cross were unparalleled.* 1. Because of the dignity of His person. 2. Because of the perfect innocence of His character. 3. Because there was such a conjunction of griefs. 4. Because they were voluntarily undertaken and continued in. 5. Because those for whom He died thus voluntarily were His enemies. 6. Because they were expiatory. II. *The sufferings of Christ have had a deep interest in them for many.* 1. Multitudes have found in them a cure for despair. 2. In others they have wrought a complete transformation of their lives. 3. Had power on men's minds to gird them to heroic deeds. 4. Men who love the suffering Saviour become patient in their every-day sufferings. 5. They learn to hate sin by seeing the agonies by which redemption was obtained. III. *What have you to do with Christ?* Write down your decision whether you will have Christ or not. A poor, suffering girl, who had long loved the Saviour, under a feeling of depression, confessed to her minister that she had deceived herself, and did not love Him. The minister walked to the window and wrote on a piece of paper, "I do not love the Lord Jesus Christ," and said, "Susan, here is a pencil. Just put your name to that." "No, sir," she said, "I could not sign that." "Why not?" "I would be torn to pieces before I would sign it, sir." "But why not sign it if it is true?" "Ah! sir," she said, "I hope it is not true. I think I do love Him."—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

— **Our duty towards the Jewish people.** I. *The facts on which the appeal is founded.* The unparalleled sorrow and sufferings of the Jewish people. Where is the nation that has been subject to such universal contempt? All mankind seems to have conspired to despise the Jews. They seem under the curse of Heaven. II. *The appeal itself.* "Is it

nothing to you?" That the world should pass by we cannot wonder. That the heathen or Mohammedan should neglect the Jew can excite no surprise. That the mere self-loving nominal Christian should heed him not, is all natural; but that the follower of Christ should pass by may well excite astonishment. It is an error to suppose we need not care to labour among the Jews because the Gospel is a Gentile dispensation, and that the Jews are shut out until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. The Gospel is as much a Jewish dispensation as was the Law. To them it was promised; to them it was given. By them it was proclaimed to the Gentiles, and theirs it still is. Zeal for the honour of Christ should lead us to direct our first endeavours to the Jewish people.—*M'Caul.*

Ver. 13. **Divine punishment.** I. *Marked by great severity.* "From above hath He sent fire into my bones, and it prevaileth against them." II. *Admits of no escape from its toils.* "He hath spread a net for my feet; He hath turned me back." III. *Thoroughly subdues the sufferer.* "He hath made me desolate and faint all the day."

Ver. 14. **The galling tyranny of sin.** I. *Oppressive.* "The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand; they are wreathed and come up upon my neck." II. *Exhausting.* "He hath made my strength to fall." III. *Reduces the soul to helplessness.* "The Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up."

— **The misery of the penitent.** 1. When conscious of the burden of sin. 2. When realising his increasing helplessness. III. When abandoned to reap the consequences of his transgressions. 4. Can be relieved only by the pitifulness of the Divine mercy.

Ver. 15. **Inglorious defeat.** I. *The veteran warriors are captured in the midst of the city from which they had not courage to issue forth and defend.* "The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me." II. *The combinations of the foe were too powerful for the bravery of the young to*

resist. "He hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men."

III. *The defeat of the nation is abject and complete.* "The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a wine-press."

Vers. 16, 17. **The helplessness of despair.** I. *Tears and entreaties are in vain.* "For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water. Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her" (vers. 16, 17). II. *Sin debases a people in the estimation of God and man.* "Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman"—hath become a loathing—"among them" (ver. 17). III. *There is no hope of escape.* "My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed" (ver. 16). "The Lord hath commanded concerning Jacob that his adversaries should be round about him" (ver. 17).

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **A distressed nation: the havoc of war.** When the French army invaded Russia in 1812, and penetrated as far as Moscow, Count Rostopchin, the governor, thinking it more glorious to destroy the ancient capital of the Czars than suffer it to harbour and protect an enemy, caused it to be burned to the ground. The most heartrending scenes were witnessed. The people, hastily snatching up their most precious effects, fled before the flames. Others, actuated by the general feelings of nature, saved only their parents or their infants, who were closely clasped in their arms. They were followed by their other children, running as fast as their little strength would permit, and, with all the wildness of childish terror, vociferating the beloved name of mother! The old people, borne down by grief more than by age, had not sufficient power to follow their families, and expired near the houses in which they were born. No cry, no complaint was heard. Both the conqueror and the conquered were equally hardened. The fire, whose ravages could not be restrained, soon reached the finest parts of the city. The palaces were enveloped in flames. Their magnificent fronts, ornamented

with bas-reliefs and statues, fell with a dreadful crash. The churches, with their steeples resplendent with gold and silver, were destroyed. The hospitals, containing more than 12,000 wounded, began to burn, and almost all the inmates perished. A few who still lingered were seen crawling half burnt amongst the smoking ruins, and others, groaning under heaps of dead bodies, endeavoured in vain to extricate themselves from the horrible destruction which surrounded them. From whatever side viewed, nothing was seen but ruin and flames. The fire raged as if it were fanned by some invisible power. The most extensive range of buildings seemed to kindle, to burn, and to disappear in an instant. The wild pillagers precipitated themselves into the midst of the flames. They waded in blood, treading on dead bodies without remorse, while the burning ruins fell on their murderous hands. The signal patriotism of sacrificing the city in order to subdue the enemy actuated all ranks.

Affliction reveals our sins. So long as leaves are on the trees and bushes, you cannot see the bird's nests; but in the winter, when all the leaves are off, then you see them plainly. And so long as men are in prosperity and have their leaves on, they do not see what nests of sin and lust are in their hearts and lives; but when all their leaves are off, in the day of their afflictions, then they see them, and say, "I did not think I had had such nests of sins and lusts in my soul and life."—*Bridge.*

Whose sorrows are like unto mine? O thou erring mortal, repine not. Our Father has some great and wise purpose in thus afflicting thee, and wilt thou dare murmur against Him when He removed the idol that He alone may reign? Pause and reflect. Examine well thy conscience, and see if there were not earthly attractions clinging to thy soul and leading thee to forget the Creator in thy love for the creature. Raise not thy feeble voice against the Most High, lest He send upon thee a still greater trial in order to teach thee submission. Behold His noble example when persecuted by a whole world.

Imagine Him, the God of the universe, standing before the Jewish Sanhedrin, condemned, buffeted, spit upon! One blazing look of wrathful indignation would have annihilated that rude rabble; but, with all the beauty and grace of self-abnegation, He bowed His head and prayed, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Wouldst thou find relief for thy sufferings? Contemplate the life of Him who spake as never man spake. Follow Him through all those years of toil and suffering. Witness His deeds of mercy and love, and then—go thou and do likewise.—*German Reformed Messenger.*

Self-sacrifice. An extraordinary example of self-sacrifice was witnessed at Chicago. A member of the brotherhood of Knight-Templars was operated upon for cancer, and a wound nearly a foot square was left. The surgeon declared that if the patient was to recover, the wound must be covered with new human skin. At once 132 members of the brotherhood volunteered to allow a small strip of skin to be cut from their arms, so that the pieces thus obtained might be transferred to the wound of their comrade. The operation was performed. Several of the brave fellows fainted, but the majority bore the incision of the surgeon's knife without flinching. It is inspiring to hear of such heroic self-sacrifice. Much of the suffering of the Christian worker is vicarious; but no number of acts of suffering on behalf of others can equal the sublime sacrifice of Him who suffered and died for the whole race.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Divine punishment and pessimism. Noah was a pessimist to the antediluvian world; Moses was a pessimist to Pharaoh in Egypt; Samuel was a pessimist, and his very first prediction foretold the downfall of the aged Eli and his godless family. Jeremiah was a pessimist, constantly foretelling evil and danger; Jonah was a pessimist, who disturbed the peace of the city, crying, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Nahum was a pessimist, crying, "Woe to the bloody city!"

Micaiah was a pessimist when he foretold the overthrow of Ahab, the guilty king, who complained that he never prophesied any good of him. The Saviour was a pessimist, for He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and the calamities that were to come upon the world. The Apostles Peter, James, John, Jude were all pessimists, for they were continually foretelling perilous times, departure from the faith, and the coming judgment upon the godless world. The great preachers and poets of the ages have been pessimists, for they were ever warning men of present evil and coming wrath, of predicted calamities and judgments overhanging the godless and profane.—*Christian Repository.*

Sin a slavery.

"There is a bondage which is worse to bear
Than his who breathes, by roof and floor
and wall
Pent in, a tyrant's solitary thrall:
'Tis his who walks about in the open air,
One of a nation who henceforth must wear
Their fetters in their souls."

—Wordsworth.

Discovery of the destructive work of sin. The steeple of the Church of St. Bride, London, originally built by Christopher Wren, was struck by lightning in 1764, and the upper part had to be rebuilt, when it was lowered eight feet. It was then discovered that an old hawk had inhabited the two upper circles, the open arcades of which were filled with masses of birds' bones, chiefly those of the city pigeons upon which it had preyed. It would be well if more frequent discovery could be made of those wily hawks of society who prey with such merciless and ingenious greed upon the simple and unsuspecting. Their discovery is all the more difficult when they make the Church of Christ their hiding-place, and the clean-picked relics of their numerous victims are all the more sad to contemplate when one at length finds out that the work of plunder has been carried on under the sacred garb of religion.

The misery of the penitent; how cured. Five persons were studying what were the best means for mortifying

sin. One said, to meditate on death; the second, to meditate on judgment; the third, to meditate on the joys of heaven; the fourth, to meditate on the torments of hell; the fifth, to meditate on the blood and sufferings of Christ; and certainly the last is the choicest and strongest motive of all. If ever we would cast off our despairing thoughts, we must dwell and muse much upon and apply this precious blood to our own souls; so shall sorrow and mourning flee away.—*Brooks*.

Remorse. Remorse may disturb the slumbers of a man who is dabbling with his first experiences of wrong; and when the pleasure has been tasted and is gone, and nothing is left of the crime but the ruin which it has wrought, then the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow. But the meridian of evil is for the most part left unvexed; and when a man has chosen his road, he is left alone to follow it to the end.—*Froude*.

Inglorious defeat—The retreat from Moscow. The annals of ancient and modern warfare, in the vast catalogue of woes which they record, do not present a parallel to the sufferings of the French on the retreat from Moscow—sufferings neither cheered by hope nor mitigated by the slightest relief. The army in its retreat had to encamp on the bare snow in the midst of the severest winter that even Russia ever experienced. The soldiers, without shoes and almost without clothes, were enfeebled by fatigue and famine. Sitting on their knapsacks, the cold buried some in a temporary, but more in an eternal sleep. Those who were able to rise from this benumbing posture, only did it to broil some slices of horse-flesh, perhaps cut from their favourite charger, or to melt a few morsels of ice. In the march it was impossible to keep them in order, as imperious hunger seduced them from their colours, and threw their columns into confusion. Many of the French women accompanied the army on foot, with shoes of stuff little calculated to defend them from the frozen snow, and clad in old robes of silk or the thinnest muslin; and they were

glad to cover themselves with tattered pieces of military cloaks, torn from the dead bodies of the soldiers. The cold was so severe that men were frozen to death in the ranks, and at every step were seen the dead bodies of the soldiers stretched on the snow. Of four hundred thousand warriors who had crossed the Niemen at the opening of the campaign, scarcely twenty thousand repassed it. Such was the dreadful havoc which a Russian winter caused to the finest, best-appointed, and most powerful army that ever took the field.

Christianity addresses the despairing. Throughout all the ages which have followed Christ's word, Christ's message has rung in with power upon men's lives just in proportion to their dejection and despair. One of the earliest attacks upon Christianity was the censure that it was a word to the miserable. Such indeed it is. If it is censurable to move among men when they are dispirited, when they have come to the end of a civilisation, when nothing but blank hopelessness and no remedy lies in front of them, then Christianity is censurable, Christ's message is open to reproach. If that be a fault, it is not faultless. It stands condemned. If too you deem it blameworthy to go to the individual when he has sinned, when he has flung away his life madly, wickedly, passionately, to stand beside him, nay, to bend over him with affectionate interest, when he is lying ragged, beaten, hungry, and filthy in the far country into which he has gone, then neither Christianity nor Christ can escape your blame. They stand convicted of the crime of receiving sinners and eating with them, of laying their hands on lepers who are unclean, of seeking the society of the demented and insane.—*Rev. H. Ross*.

Crying to God. Several children of a family were once playing in a garden when one fell into a tank. When the father heard of it, he asked what means they thought of to rescue their brother from his perilous situation. Inquiring of the youngest, he said, "John, what did you do to rescue your brother?"

The boy answered, "Father, what should I do? I am so young that I could not do anything, but I stood and cried as loud as I could." If we cannot bring a ladder or rope, all can cry, all can plead with God.

HOMILETICS.

THE BITTER FRUITS OF REBELLION.

(Verses 18-22.)

I. That rebellion is the violation of the law of a righteous God. "The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against His commandment" (ver. 18). "I have grievously rebelled" (ver. 20). A man may fight against God's will and exalt his own; but he cannot fight against the law by which obedience brings peace, harmony, and joy to the soul, and disobedience brings unrest, pain, and deadness. All things in God's universe proclaim the folly of the man who thinks to oppose his will to the Infinite. He may to some extent succeed in thwarting the Divine will; but he cannot prosper. What may seem success will turn into shame and ruin. The violation of law puts us out of harmony with God, Nature, and man.

II. That rebellion is the occasion of great national disasters. 1. *The young are enslaved.* "My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity" (ver. 18). There is little hope for the future of a nation when its young people are in degrading bondage. Christianity has created a just appreciation of the worth of young life. A Japanese woman once came to a Christian lady in Japan with a girl-baby which had been thrown into a ditch by its father, as thousands were, because it was "only a girl." In begging the Christian lady to take care of the naked child, covered with mud, the poor woman said, "Please do take little baby. Your God is the only God that teaches to be good to little children." 2. *Friendships are demoralised.* "I called for my lovers, but they deceived me" (ver. 19). The confusion that springs out of rebellion is a severe strain on the fidelity of professed friends. Promises made with the utmost solemnity are little regarded. One brave and truthful action tells more than a million utterances of the mouth. Genuine friendship is ever frank and true. Simplicity is not the absence of intricacy, but its solution. The true friend, however much misunderstood in a time of disorder, comes out scatheless. 3. *The nation is ravaged by war, famine, and death.* "Abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death" (ver. 20). "My priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls" (ver. 29). Those who should have advised and comforted the people were disabled by starvation, or were lying dead among the slain. 4. *The sufferings of the people are distressingly acute.* "I am in distress; my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me" (ver. 20). My heart is so violently agitated that it seems to have changed its position—to be overturned. It is difficult to conceive words that could more pathetically describe the extremity of grief. Much of our trouble is intensified by forebodings as to the future. God gives us strength to bear each day's burden as it comes. When we stagger and fall because our burden has become too heavy, it is because we have added of our own accord something of the future's weight to that of the present. 5. *The enemies gloat over the national troubles.* "They have heard that I sigh; there is none to comfort me. All mine enemies have heard of my trouble. They are glad that thou hast done it" (ver. 21). It is the acme of cruelty and obduracy of heart to chuckle over the miseries of the fallen. How different is the true Christian spirit. Lord Shaftesbury earned the title of "the good Earl" by his philanthropic endeavours to raise the most depraved. A costermonger who had been a most notorious sinner was once asked, "What did his Lordship say to you

that made you a reformed man?" "Oh, he didn't say much," was the reply. "He just sat down by my side and said, 'Jack, we will make a man of you yet.'" It was the upward gravitation of Christian manhood that helped Jack, and many like him.

III. That every nation that rebels against God will be certainly punished. "Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me. Do unto them as Thou hast done unto me," &c. (ver. 21, 22). The prophet, in terms that seem dictated by a spirit of retaliation, is but expressing in prophecy what actually happened in the capture of Babylon—the destruction of the Chaldean empire and of the neighbouring states by which the Jews had been ill-used. He also expressed the general truth, so often exemplified in history, that the nations that ignore God come to nought.

LESSONS.—1. *The greatest troubles of a nation are the result of rebellion.* 2. *God is not indifferent to the sufferings of a nation under punishment.* 3. *Obedience to God is the only guarantee of national prosperity.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 18. "The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against His commandment." **Divine justice:** 1. Is publicly acknowledged. 2. Must punish rebellion. 3. Is ever mingled with mercy.

— "Hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow." **The voice of sorrow:** 1. Has a lesson for all classes. 2. Cannot express all that is felt. 3. Excites sympathy among the most indifferent. 4. Should lead to inquiry as to its cause.

— "My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity." **Young life:** 1. The hope and strength of a nation. 2. Should be placed in the most favourable circumstances for development and culture. 3. Is crushed by the degradation of slavery.

Ver. 19. "I called for my lovers, but they deceived me." **Human fickleness:** 1. A bitter disappointment when shown by those we love, and who have professed to love us. 2. Cannot bear the strain of a great trial. Fails us when we most need help. 3. A pure, unselfish, faithful affection a rarity. 4. Should teach us to trust alone in God.

Ver. 20. **Sincere penitence:** I. *Shown in a frank and full confession of sin.* "I have grievously sinned." II. *Experiences the most pungent sorrow for sin.* "I am in distress: my bowels are troubled: mine heart is turned within me." III. *Appeals to God alone for mercy.* "Behold, O Lord."

Ver. 21. **A spirit of enmity:** I. *Is coldly indifferent to the troubles of others, though cognisant of them.* "All mine enemies have heard of my trouble."

II. *Exhibits a refinement of cruelty in rejoicing over the distresses of its victims.* "They are glad thou hast done it."

III. *Will meet with a day of retribution.* "Thou wilt bring the day that Thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me."

Ver. 22. **The punishment of Judah a type of the punishment of all unfaithful nations.** I. *Their sins are fully known to God.* "Let all their wickedness come before Thee." II. *They will be punished according to their actual sins.* "Do unto them as Thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions." III. *They shall know what it is to endure sorrow and exhaustion.* "For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint."

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Rebellion — Dead Sea fruit.**—If Satan ever knows pleasure at all, it is of the foulest and most unsatisfactory kind. Dust is his meat. There is nothing satisfying in the pleasures of rebellion. He remains a disappointed, restless being. The most cunning error which he invents and sustains by philosophy is no more than dust. His whole cause, for which he has laboured these thousands of years with a horrible perseverance, will dis-

solve into dust, and be blown away as smoke. Still doth he feed himself on dust. Let those who are servants of Satan know assuredly that as they are living in sin they will have to eat at their father's table and learn the emptiness of all the pleasures of sin, and the worthlessness of all the treasures of evil. Everything that sin can bring you is just so much dust—foul eating, insufficient, clogging, killing. Though you hoard up wealth, gold is nothing but dust to a dying man. Though you gain all earthly honour, it too dissolves into dust. This is the misery of that great spirit who is called the Prince of Darkness, that he must eat dust all his days. But what misery it must be to be only some poor subject in that unhalloved kingdom, and still to be doomed to the same loathsome fare! Dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. Note that right well; and may God deliver you from such feeding!—*Spurgeon*.

Fomenting rebellion, a ruinous policy. The rebellion in the Netherlands had already been an expensive matter to the crown. The Spanish army numbered more than sixty-two thousand men. Forty millions of dollars had already been sunk, and it seemed probable that it would require nearly the whole annual produce of the American mines to sustain the war. The Transatlantic gold and silver, disinterred from the depths where they had been buried for ages, were employed not to expand the current of a healthy, life-giving commerce, but to be melted into blood. The sweat and tortures of the king's pagan subjects in the primeval forests of the New World were made subsidiary to the extermination of his Netherland people and the destruction of an ancient civilisation. To this end had Columbus discovered a hemisphere for Castile and Aragon, and the new Indies revealed their hidden treasures. The military expenses alone of the Netherlands were more than seven million dollars yearly, and the mines of the New World produced an annual average of only eleven. There was not a stiver left in the ex-

chequer, nor the means of raising one. Such was the condition to which the unrelenting tyranny and financial experiments of Alva had reduced the country.—*Motley's "Dutch Republic."*

Sorrow does not regenerate. On a May day in the French Revolution of 1848, a wretched-looking man was seen dragging himself along by the help of a stick, fleeing from the excited and rushing crowd, till he entered a hall in the Louvre, where was an exquisite piece of sculpture, the Venus of Milos. Before this statue the man broke down, and bitter tears streamed over his face. That man was Heinrich Heine, the scoffing Israelite. This one moment disclosed a whole world of heartache. "Deepest misery, thy name is Heine!" was the passionate cry that escaped his lips. The source of this misery was the pleasure of the world. The goddess before whom he lay prostrate entwined the poet with the glowing arms of sense. He had sacrificed all to her—body, soul, conscience, reason, heart, and harp. "Once," he groaned, "I fancied, with Hegel, I was a god; now I know I am a sick, forgotten Jew." Sixteen years, filled with unexampled pains, followed, but it was only a transitory glance of faith to which the poet attained. On the whole, affliction only excited him to new blasphemies.—*Otto Funcke*.

Justice and mercy. Terror is subservient to love. As a skilful painter fills the background of his picture with his darker colours, so God introduces the black thunder-clouds of Sinai to give brighter prominence to Jesus, the Cross of Calvary, and His love to the chief of sinners.—*Guthrie*.

Youth. Youth and white paper take any impression. The young are the divinely-appointed heirs of the great past, and the fathers of the sublime future.

— Perhaps as the Creator looks down on this world, whose wondrous beauty beams on us more and more in proportion as our science would take it from poetry into law, He beholds nothing so beautiful as the pure heart of a simple, loving child.—*Lytton*.

Human fickleness a disappointment.

Astronomers tell us that temporary stars attain their maximum brightness only once and for all. They burst into brilliance suddenly, come to a point, continue at that point only for a short time, and then vanish, either by exploding or by coming into collision with another body. It is difficult to see the reason for their existence at all, except to show that the steady, dependable light of the permanent star is of more service in the heavens than the flashing brilliance that dazzles only to confuse and mislead. It is dangerous to be star of any kind, whether pulpit star, political star, or social star; but to be a temporary star is the most provoking and disappointing of all.—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

Human fickleness and its contrast.

At a trial in Anglesey the heroic devotion of a wife and the base fickleness and savagery of a husband were painfully illustrated. The prisoner saved his neck through the self-forgetful devotion of his wife, who sat at his side, pale and suffering, through the trial. If it had been known that the third bullet fired from his pistol was even then lodging in the body of his faithful wife, nothing would have saved his life. It was only after the miserable man had been convicted of murder in a minor degree that did not involve hanging that she applied to a doctor, confessed that her husband had shot her, and that the bullet was still in her hip. Who can fathom a woman's love and devotion? It is often strangely lavished on those who deserve it least.—*Ibid*.

Penitence involves confession of sin.

Sometimes a prisoner is advised to plead not guilty because his advocate has discovered a flaw in the indictment, or a weak place in the chain of evidence, and he may get the benefit of the doubt. Not so in the case of the sinner; there can be no doubt. The evidence is cumulative. He is caught red-handed in the act of sin. His only hope for mercy is in a full and frank confession.

How enmity is manufactured.

"Right must right remain," says the farmer, and goes to law with his neigh-

bour about a strip of pasture-land a quarter of a yard wide, and enmity and hatred exist between the two families for whole decades, while a thousand times the value of the disputed strip is lost over it. But no matter; "Right must right remain." Nor is it only among farmers, but among all kinds of people that such foolish and unhappy litigation takes place, just because no one chooses to give way; nay, not even to submit to the judgment of an umpire. "Right must right remain," says A, and passionately disputes in a large party with B as to whether the train which ran two years ago to H—in the evening was an ordinary or an express train; and this wretched stubbornness in disputing about trifles destroys the sociability of men who ought to have brought light and salt to each other. "Right must right remain," says this respectable man. He was offended by the harsh words of another, and has now passed him coldly by for years. "He must first apologise," he says, instead of saying, "Don't let us please the devil by hating one another; here is my hand; we are brethren and heirs of one heaven." No! "Right must right remain."—*Otto Funcke*.

Retribution. The certainty that unrepentant wickedness will be punished may be argued—1. From the principle of moral causation. God has established such a connection between character and condition that misery must ever spring from sin, and blessedness from virtue. Our present grows out of the past, hence our sins must find us out. What we morally sowed yesterday we reap in experience to-day, and so on for ever. 2. From the operation of moral memory. Memory recalls sins, places them before the eye of conscience, and sets the soul aflame. 3. From the declarations of Scripture. "The wicked shall not go unpunished. The wicked shall be turned into hell, with all the nations that forget God." 4. From the history of mankind. Nations are an example—the Antediluvians, the Sodomites, the Jews. Individuals are an example.—Moses, David, Judas.—*D. Thomas, D.D.*

CHAPTER II.

THE PUNISHMENT OF NATIONAL SIN.

In this second elegy the poet has his attention fixed on something that is beyond Chaldean and Jew. He sees, what the eyes of the world do not see, that the hand of the invisible Governor of all nations is directing both oppressor and oppressed, and is at work to show that no force and no victory, no disaster and no shame, were aimless happenings. He is to be regarded as the real agent in producing the various events referred to. His righteous judgments are not deferred to a future state: they are issued in this life against *all unrighteousness of men*, and from Him alone can relief and instruction be obtained. So throughout the song is heard the refrain that the Lord Jehovah is supreme over all the forces of the world, and over all that those forces seem to accomplish. In face of the great Babylonian power, boastful of its victories and material grandeur, deeming itself at liberty to harry, enslave, kill for its own selfish interests; in face of his ruined city and desecrated Temple, of starving children and slaughtered chiefs, the writer holds up the fact that these are not independent potentates fixing their own terms; that they are but messengers of the Lord, who *doeth according to His will, in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth*, and who is preparing ways for the triumph of His free mercy and unstained holiness. "This Hebrew was saved from the terrible conclusion that the selfish, cruel force, which in his day carried all before it, was the highest power in life, simply by believing righteousness to be more exalted still." (Smith). Every nerve may tingle with pain, everything dear may be cut down, every step onward may seem to add another misery, but God's righteous and loving will shall make all things work together for "the far-off divine" eventualities towards "which the whole creation" is impelled.

Two principal divisions mark off the poem. The first, ver. 1-10, describes the palpable effects of the subjugation on things and persons. Ascribing these to the Lord, he passes, in the second section, to mournful utterances over the obvious desolations—harping, as grief is prone to do, on the same note—and concludes with a call for prayer to the Lord, and the form which that prayer would take in such dire straits.

(N) Ver. 1. The poet sees nature as if it were in commotion. A storm-cloud piles up over Jerusalem, shrouding with its gloom even the most commanding summit. But it is not the swirls of an inanimate force which he perceives, nor yet the rush of human passion in an army of cruel men, it is the Supreme Ruler who *hath His way in the whirlwind, and the storm of anger and strife, and the clouds of disaster are the dust of His feet*. How doth the Lord in His anger; anger is the acting quality which impresses its aspect on the writer's mind, as is shown by his frequent references to it—twice here, and in vers. 3, 6, 21, 22, cf. ver. 2: *cover with a cloud the daughter of Zion*. Under this expression, and the similar ones which follow, *daughter of Judah, daughter of Jerusalem*, is included inhabitants of all classes; no principle but that of poetic license apparently regulating the employment of either name. The storm-cloud has swept across the land which was called *the glory of all lands*, and *He has cast down from heaven* those arrow-like lightnings which have scathed, discomfited, and overthrown *unto the earth the glory of Israel*. The election of Israel to be the covenant people of the living God had given it a position as high above that of all other peoples *as the heavens are higher than the earth*, and this position was represented by a visible shrine—the Temple. *It was the holy and beautiful house where our fathers praised Thee*, and now it was *burned up with fire*. Nor did He recall any past manifestations of His presence to *stay His hand from working*: *He has not remembered His footstool*; the *footstool of our God* is closely associated with the *ark of the covenant* (1 Chron. xxviii. 2; Ps. xcix. 1, 5). The Cherubim stood over the cover of the ark, the mercy-seat, and as *God sitteth between the Cherubim*, His feet would be on the ark, yet He let this holiest of holy things be destroyed *in the day of His anger*—the day which broke amid the sounds of Divine justice going to punish evil—the *great day of Jehovah*, which Zephaniah predicted . . . *a day of wrath . . . a day of vastness and desolation . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness*. The poet "could not have better expressed to the people the heinousness of their sins than by laying before them this fact, that God *remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger*" (Calvin).

(2) Ver. 2. Faint adumbrations of the concomitants of a storm still flit across the field of vision. As a sweeping torrent the Lord has swallowed up, and has not spared, all the habitations of Jacob, including all sorts of country residences, and pasture-lands where men like Jacob may dwell in tents and feed flocks; all unfortified and unprotected places, as distinguished from fortresses in following parallel line: *He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah*; the whole military power has gone under, also the governing power *he has cast to the earth*, thus making them *lick the dust* and be trod upon by passers-by; *He has profaned the kingdom, the royal house, and its princes*: similarly it is said (Ps. lxxxix. 39), *Thou hast profaned His crown [casting it] to the ground*—the crown of His anointed, whom he had *cast off and rejected* (ver. 38). The tenor of Bible-teaching is to the effect that men by sin affect the materials which they use, and so not only the sinners themselves, but their dwellings, their goods, their plots of ground, their munitions, their governments, are scourged

by the wrath of God, in order to purify them from the pollution which has been infiltrated into them by human guilt.

(3) Ver. 3. Three forms of disaster are specified. **He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel** : the horn being used as a symbol of strength or power, then all that was regarded as a strength to the life of Israel, whether warlike men or arsenals of offensive and defensive weapons, has perished. Power of resistance is removed. **He has drawn back His right hand from the face of the enemy** ; He does not *pluck it out of His bosom* to help His people, and to impede and rout the foes in their attacks. Aid is withheld. **And He has burned in Jacob like a blazing fire, devouring round about** : His anger, as it were, kindled a conflagration which has consumed all it touched. Consequent on strength gone and help refused, there is blank devastation.

(7) Ver. 4. If a human enemy has wreaked his vengeance on Israel, the Lord Himself has *turned to be their enemy, and fought against them* as an armed man. **He has bent His bow as an enemy standing, [as to] His right hand, as an adversary.** This ambiguous phrase seems to convey the idea that the Lord, *like a man of war*, had taken a hostile attitude and operation, so that **He has slain all that was pleasant to the eye**, everything esteemed was deprived of their qualities to please. **On the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out as fire His fury.** Jerusalem as the dwelling-place of its inhabitants has been searched and scorched with the *spirit of justice and spirit of burning*.

The preceding highly metaphorical expressions are suggestive ; they show that the poet saw, what the men of his day, what the men of later days have failed to see aright, that the course of human life is aglow with the *devouring fire* of the holiness of God. *The light of Israel is for a fire and his Holy One for a flame.* Jews might have felt that the Chaldeans and others had made their land as a *desolate wilderness* ; we might feel that, when we are worsted in "the struggle for life," our "environment" has been unfavourable to us. *Our eyes are holden*, and we do not perceive that the righteousness of God is the grand factor in all defeats, all crashes, all panics, all losses ; using bad things, as fuel is used, to produce a fierce heat which shall eat away all that is burnable. Not only on the other side of death is the *unquenchable fire* scorching sin ; that fire is kindled and burning here and now. No screen can ward off the indignation of the just and holy Lord ; the ashes of ruined fortunes, reputations, impurities, self-seekings, prove that *the breath of the Lord has kindled a fire* to run through human society as intense, as overwhelming as a stream of liquid lava. *For our God is a consuming fire.*

(7) Ver. 5. Hostilities were continued in other methods. **The Lord has become as an enemy, has swallowed up Israel** ; the national is submerged. This is indicated by material evidence ; **He has swallowed up all her palaces**, the great houses of the daughter of Zion ; **He has destroyed all His strongholds**, the fortified places which had been garrisoned by the people, and **He has multiplied in the daughter of Judah moaning and bemoaning.** Two words, which are derived from the same Hebrew root, and similar in sound, express the manifold and intense sorrows which had been experienced.

(1) Ver. 6. The dwelling-place of Jehovah on Mount Zion, which He claims as His own possession, with all its appointed services, has shared in the tribulations. **He has treated violently, as a garden, His booth.** The references in vers. 6 and 7 being to the methods of Divine worship, the reference here will be to the Temple. *He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men*, and instead of this, *in Salem was His tabernacle* = booth, but it also had come to be only a temporary habitation for the mighty God : that which He had sanctified had been profaned by the inroads of unsanctified men. As a booth in a vineyard is dismantled when the vintage is ingathered, so the stately Temple was contemptuously broken down. The Septuagint reading, *He tore up His tabernacle as a vine*, harmonises with the idea of the Hebrew phrase, viz., that the House of the Lord was laid waste. Consequent on this, **He has destroyed his [place of] solemn assembly**, where He met with His people and blessed them ; following this came awful manifestations of indifference even to the helps to serving the Lord. The covenant God Jehovah has caused to be forgotten in Zion solemn assembly and sabbath ; the annual and weekly services were no longer in the minds of His professed people. The old ritual was unavailable. Communion with one another and communion with God through established religious forms were altogether in abeyance. They had to be taught that *that which decayeth and waxeth aged* is to be replaced by a new covenant in which the service of men, and the service of God would not be by ordered rules, but by *love in the spirit*. The persons also who had been officially prominent in Temple-services were swept off the stage ; **He has despised, set no store by, in the vehemence of His anger, king and priest.** The priesthood was indispensable to the Temple-worship till *there ariseth another Priest, made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life*. The connection of royalty with the Temple is thus explained by Oehler : "The Israelitish kingdom, especially in David and Solomon, bears a certain sacerdotal character, inasmuch as the king, at the head of the people and in their name, pays homage to God and brings back again to the people the blessings of God." This, however, is defective in statement. What was done by the king was not done in any priestly capacity, but as being the chief member of the sacerdotal people. They were a *kingdom of priests unto Jehovah*. Besides, it was done as representative of the Davidic monarchy, with which the building and continuance of services in the house of the Lord were closely linked

(Jer. xxxiii. 21). Viewed in this light, the lamentation is, that Jehovah has rejected both the royal family of David and the Levitical priesthood.

(1) Ver. 7. There has been entire desecration of the holy places. **The Lord has cast off his altar**, the appointed erection on which *burnt-offerings and sacrifices* were presented to Him, and which should come up *with acceptance* there. There was no standing for such action now. He had abandoned it—its fires were quenched and cold: **he has abhorred his sanctuary**, the whole enclosure of the holy places. But there all is not still; **He has put into the hand of her enemy the walls of her palaces**, the crowning buildings of Mount Zion have been delivered up to hostile people, and **they have given voice in the house of the Lord**; a victorious multitude made within the glory-hallowed precincts such a jubilant noise as [in] a day of a solemn assembly, but the clamour was the clamour of ruthless conquerors, not of rejoicing worshippers.

(11) Ver. 8. Jeremiah relates (chap. lii. 14) that *all the army of the Chaldeans, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down all the walls of Jerusalem round about*. This was from no mere chance of warfare, no shrewd decision of the commander of the invaders; it was from the predetermination of the God of Israel. **Jehovah has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion**. It was carried out according as He incited or restrained the agents of its accomplishment; **he has stretched out the [measuring] line**, and until His limitations were reached **he has not withdrawn his hand from overthrowing**. Every division of the fortifications has suffered, and **he has made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languish together**. All calamities have their methods and boundaries fixed by the All-wise. They do not form a chaos, brought about by natural forces or human power. They are in an exact order, and proceed to a verge which He has appointed. They are pregnant with gigantic issues.

(12) Ver. 9. Traces of the best constructed part of the wall have disappeared, covered with debris. **Her gates have sunk into the earth**; the very means of fastening them are in fragments; **he has destroyed and broken her bars**. Like that had befallen the political and religious barriers which separated her from other peoples. **Her king and princes are among the nations**, swept away into exile. With the removal of civil authorities self-seeking and anarchy had supervened. God's rule of life, which required Temple and altar for its material symbol, exists no more for the people; **there is no law**. Still more sad, the proofs of the Lord's guidance had been withheld; **even her prophets find no vision from Jehovah** to bring help and comfort. There might be prophets, but they received no *burden of the Lord*. He will put aside for a time His means of grace, if they cease to answer Divine ends.

(13) Ver. 10. Two classes, who were exponents of the intelligence and joy of the people, prostrated like the rest, are no longer capable of acting their parts. **They sit on the ground, are silent, the elders of the daughter of Zion**; they exhibit other profound tokens of overwhelming sufferings. "Small griefs are eloquent—great ones are dumb." Also among the ruins **they hang down their heads to the ground, the virgins of Jerusalem**; the song, the timbrel, the dance, have all been abandoned as vain things.

The retrospect of the poet, which had brought before him one sad scene after another in the destruction of the Jewish state, and the desperate lot of various classes of its people, produced a turmoil of emotions in himself, and appeals to men and God to join in his lamentations.

(14) Ver. 11. So exasperating is his misery that he feels as if organic parts of his body were dismembered. **My eyes fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the ground**—an effect of terrible grief, showing how body and soul are sympathetic with each other over the breach of the daughter of my people. This shattered condition was replete with the harrowing details of suffering, as **when the young children and the sucklings faint in the streets of the city**.

(15) Ver. 12. His ears heard their piteous cravings, while to their mothers they are saying, **Where is corn and wine, solid and liquid nourishment**. Even when listening, his eyes saw the older children faint as the wounded in the streets of the city, and infants in arms poured their souls into their mother's bosom, which could supply no aliment.

(16) Ver. 13. He is ready, as a servant of the All-merciful and All-wise, to speak on His behalf, so as to alleviate the clamant wretchedness; but he feels unable. **What shall I testify to thee?** No message is given to him from the Most High, and no resemblance to her condition is perceptible on the broad surface of past or present human life. **What liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem?** The case is unparalleled, and there are no lessons applicable. **What shall I compare to thee and comfort thee [with], O virgin daughter of Zion?** For great is thy breach like the sea. Who will heal thee? Ruin had extended as far as to the horizon of the people's existence, and to the deep springs of thought. True, there had not been wanting men who professed to be commissioned by Jehovah to declare that all would be well. *They healed the hurt*—the word here translated *breach*—*of the daughter of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace*.

(17) Ver. 14. The Book of Jeremiah contains ample evidence as to who those miserable comforters were. It shows that, during the period just preceding the overthrow of Judæa, there were a number of persons who were accustomed glibly to say, *The burden of Jehovah*, but who were mere pretenders to divine visions, who gave chaff and not wheat. The reason lay in the character of the people, that formed its own instruments in politics and religion. If a people prefer to have sensational statesmen, such statesmen will appear. If prophets prophesy falsely,

it is because the people love to have it so. They say unto the prophets, *Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits.* They got what they wanted. Thy prophets have seen for thee, and the result is vanity and foolishness, unreal and unreasonable things. They did not make known the will of God so as to expose the evil ways and doings of the people, and prepare for amendment. They have not uncovered thine iniquity to turn away thy captivity. Instead of that, their boasted visions tended to produce burdens of vanity and causes of banishment. *They prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land, and that I should drive you out.*

(D) Ver. 15. Casual strangers on their travels felt glad at sight of desolated Jerusalem. They clap their hands at thee, all who pass by the way, and add scorn to gladness; they hiss and wag their head. They use sarcasm, *Is this the city which they called the perfection of beauty, a joy to the whole earth?* So the glorying of the Jews is turned into a reproach and shame.

(E) Ver. 16. A similar but wider view is presented than in the preceding verse. Not strangers, but all thine enemies, filled with mockery and exultation, have opened their mouth against thee. There is testimony in the Psalms as to how Orientals can belch out with their mouth. Abrupt utterances follow, and intimate how excited and impassioned they were. We have swallowed up. Hah! this is the day which we have expected, have found, have seen. Now at length we see what we sought, get what we wanted.

(F) Ver. 17. Whatever are the calamities suffered, whatever the taunts to which the people are exposed in their ruined condition, they have not come from the onslaught of ruthless foes, but from God, their own God. That was the final fact of the catastrophe which had overwhelmed them. It is not the generalisations, called "laws," which make history what it is, but the will of "the living Lord." He controls all existences, and His methods with them are always definite and consistent. *Not one faileth.* Jehovah has done that which he purposed; he has fulfilled his word which he commanded from the days of old. Compare Lev. xxvi. 14 ff; Dent. xxviii. 15 ff. He keeps His word. His order has been faithfully carried out in the overthrow of Jerusalem, and, giving entire power to boasting destroyers, he has exalted the horn of thine adversaries.

(G) Ver. 18. Their heart cried unto the Lord. The cry is not to the God in covenant with Israel, but to the ruler over all nations and all matter. Yet the pronoun *their* cannot refer to the persons last spoken of. The adversaries were not likely to change their vaunts into profound sympathy. It is appropriate to suppose that there was a part, at any rate, of the downtrodden who would tell their heart-aches to the only Helper, and could not subdue the longing to see all things around them express the tokens of keenest sorrow. *O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a torrent day and night.* Bold appeals to inanimate objects for signs of interest in human affairs are not strange to prophets of Israel, and the call upon the shattered wall of Jerusalem seems grounded on the idea that it was regarded as a mother embracing in its arms the city with its blighted hopes. It was not to be steinned and have respite; let not the pupil [Heb. daughter] of the eye cease from shedding tears.

(H) Ver. 19. Sleep is to be interrupted in order to weep. *Arise, cry loud in the night, and as its hours pass on, rouse up at the beginning of the watches* into which the night is divided. Hearts that cried are to cast away all reserve before the Lord. They will have gone a long way towards receiving help when they recognise that He who "is strong to smite is also strong to save." They will take the attitude of prayer, *Lift up thy hands to Him, and the first matter to request will be the life of thy young children, whose sad case is again mentioned, faint for hunger at the top of every street.* Dying and dead little ones at every turn. A sight for the Creator to consider.

(I) Ver. 20. The prayer is put into words correspondent with the circumstances. See, Jehovah, and behold to whom thou hast done this, to the city called thine, to the people whom thou hast chosen to be a name and praise to thee. How shocking are the consequences! See if women eat their fruit, the children whom they carried. The last word relates to that which is spread—as infants on the knees or arms. The Revised Version translates it *dandled in the hands*, which, if expressing the idea, is too special. The awful incident was a punishment threatened (Deut. xxviii. 56, 57; Jer. xix. 9). See if there are slain in the sanctuary of the Lord priest and prophet. His own holy place defiled with blood. If such spectacles were common, as they were, will God not stay His hand?

(J) Ver. 21. From the massacre in the Temple to the general slaughter of all ages and both sexes is another step in the dismal recital. The youth and the old man . . . my virgins and choice young men, were killed. It was clear that they had to bear the anger of Jehovah—that He was not only full of compassion, but in righteousness he doth judge and make war upon evil.

(K) Ver. 22. Thou hast called as in a day of solemn assembly, summoning, as by trumpet, all kinds of terrifying agencies—men, famine, fire, sword—my terrors on every side, and there was none that escaped or remained in the day of Jehovah's anger. Then, in motherly anguish, she laments again over the children she had carried and brought up, whom the enemy had cruelly consumed. So "the poem concludes, like the first, with deep sorrow, regarding which all attempts at comfort are quite unavailing."

HOMILETICS.

THE FIERCENESS OF THE DIVINE ANGER.

(Verses 1-5.)

How wierd and sad is the lonely wail of the night-wind! How depressing the monotony of the sobbing sea! How heart-rending the ceaseless moan of the helpless sufferer! All the varying cadences of melancholy seem gathered up and interpreted in the sorrowful monody of the tender-hearted prophet. It is still the voice of lamentation that we hear: the strain, like the theme, is the same. From his elevated rocky grotto Jeremiah overlooked the ruined city, and it seemed impossible for him to turn away his gaze from the scene of destruction that fascinated while it distressed him. In this chapter he describes, with vivid realism, the harrowing circumstances connected with the siege and taking of the city. By a lofty flight of prophetic imagination he describes the awful form of the Almighty hovering over Jerusalem, wreaking vengeance on the obstinate and rebellious citizens. In this paragraph we learn that *the fierceness of the Divine anger*—

I. Is a terrifying reality. “The Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down the beauty of Israel” (ver. 1). The darkening cloud that portends the approaching storm fills the stoutest heart with alarm, and all nature covers with fear under the crash of the dreadful thunder. The prophet sees the Divine anger settling upon Jerusalem like a dark thunder-cloud, and breaking in a tempest, by which the Temple is levelled to the ground. It is not the cloud that led the Israelites from bondage to freedom, but a cloud of wrath sent to punish for the aggravated abuse of that freedom. The cloud no longer guides and protects; it is now charged with the thunderbolt of retribution. The anger of God is all the more terrible when manifested towards those who once enjoyed His favour and compassion.

II. Is irresistible in its destructiveness (vers. 1-5). The beauty of Israel is deformed, her pride humbled, her strength paralysed, her city reduced to ashes, and her strongholds and inhabitants are remorselessly swept away. Nothing can withstand the Divine power, and when that power is exerted in anger, it makes short work of the most formidable opposition. Storm, earthquake, fire, war, and all the forces of the universe, obey the bidding of the Divine Word. The enemies of God will be completely overthrown by the fierceness of His anger (Exod. xv. 7; Ps. ii. 2-5, xxi. 8-10, lxxix. 6; Isa. x. 6; Jer. x. 25; Nah. i. 2; 1 Thess. ii. 16).

III. Intensifies the misery of its victims. “He hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation” (ver. 5). When our miseries come upon us from our enemies, we are not surprised; it is what we expected. When we can trace them as the direct result of our own folly and sin, we know they are deserved, and we strengthen ourselves to endure them as philosophically as we can; but when the truth dawns upon us that God is against us, and it is His hand that smites us, we are startled at the discovery, and our distress is unspeakably increased. It is a bitter ingredient in the sufferings of the disobedient to know that he has provoked the anger of the God of love. The suffering Christ turns away for us the fierceness of the Divine anger.

LESSONS.—1. *Persistency in wrong-doing rouses the Divine anger.* 2. *When the Divine anger is manifested, it works terrible havoc.* 3. *Timely repentance averts the worst consequences of the Divine anger.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1, 2. **The storm of the Divine wrath:** I. *Overshadows the city whose sins call for vengeance.* “How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger” (ver. 1). II. *Shatters the sanctuary where wor-*

ship has been profaned. "Cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger" (ver. 1). III. *Destroys the homesteads and fortresses of a rebellious people.* "The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob. He hath thrown down in his wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah" (ver. 2). IV. *Dishonours the government that ignores the claims of righteousness.* "He hath polluted (profaned, made it common or unclean) the kingdom and the princes thereof" (ver. 2).

Ver. 3. **The defences of a nation:** I. *Exposed to the ravages of the enemy when the Divine protection is withdrawn.* "He hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy." II. *Deprived of their strength when assailed by the Divine anger.* "He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel. III. *Utterly destroyed by the wrath evoked by national sins.* "He burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about."

Vers. 4, 5. **Jehovah as an enemy:** I. *Formidable to all who obstinately resist him.* "He hath bent his bow like an enemy. He stood with his right hand as an adversary" (ver. 4). II. *Works terrible destruction.* "Slew all that were pleasant to the eye. He poured out his fury like fire. He hath swallowed up Israel" (ver. 4, 5). III. *Means augmented distress to those he punishes.* "He hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation" (ver. 5).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Neglect incurs wrath. As the mariner takes the first wind to sail, the merchant the first opportunity of buying and selling, and the husbandman the first opportunity of sowing and reaping, so should young men take the present season, the present day, which is their day, to be good towards the Lord, to seek Him and serve Him, and not to put off the present season, for they know not what another day, another hour, another moment may bring forth. That door of grace that is open to-day may be

shut to-morrow; that golden sceptre of mercy that is held forth in the Gospel this day may be taken in the next day; that love, that this hour is upon the bare knee, entreating and beseeching young men to break off their sins by repentance, to return to the Lord, to lay hold on His strength and be at peace with Him, may the next hour be turned into wrath.—*Brooks.*

—Plutarch writes of Hannibal, that when he could have taken Rome he would not, and when he would have taken Rome he could not. Many in their youthful days, when they might have mercy, Christ, pardon, peace, heaven, will not; and when old age comes on they cannot, they may not. God seems to say, as Theseus once said, "Go and tell Creon, Theseus offers thee a gracious offer. Yet I am pleased to be friends if thou wilt submit—this is my first message; but if this offer prevail not, look for me to be up in arms."

—Whatever account you have to settle with God, settle it now. There are two "nows" in Scripture which should never be separated. One stands out in the brightest rays, the other retires into deep shadows. "*Now* is the accepted time." "*Now* they are hid from Thine eyes."—*Vaughan.*

Judgment a surprise. There are sometimes some sad awakenings from sleep in this world. It is very sad to dream by night of vanished joys, to revisit old scenes and dwell once more among the unforgotten forms of our loved and lost; to see in the dreamland the old familiar look, and to hear the well-remembered tones of a voice long hushed and still, and then to awake with the morning light to the aching sense of our loneliness again. It were very sad for the poor criminal to wake from sweet dreams of other and happier days—days of innocence, hope, and peace, when kind friends and a happy home and an honoured or unstained name were his; to wake in his cell on the morning of his execution to the horrible recollection that all is gone for ever, and that to-day he must die a felon's death. But inconceivably more awful than any awakening which

earthly daybreak has ever brought shall be the awakening of the self-deluded soul when it is roused in horror and surprise from the dream of life to meet Almighty God in judgment!—*J. Caird.*

Temporary storms. It is a dark and cloudy day for you. A storm has burst upon you; but you remember how, after the storm, the bow is set in the cloud for all who look above to the Hand that smites them. The storm has come, and now we must look up and wait and watch in prayer and faith for the rainbow of promise and comfort.—*Ministering Children.*

Prolonged misery. When water takes its first leap from the top, it is cool, collected, uninteresting, mathematical; but it is when it finds that it has got into a scrape, and has further to go than it thought for, that its character comes out; it is then that it begins to writhe and twist, and sweep out zone after zone in wilder stretchings as it falls, and to send down the rocket-like, lance-pointed, whizzing shafts at its sides, sounding for the bottom.—*Ruskin.*

There is mercy in every storm. Every stroke of the rod is but the muffled voice of love; every billow bears on its bosom, and every tempest on its wing, some new and rich blessing from the better land. If the Lord were to roll the Red Sea before us and marshal the Egyptians behind us, and thus, hemming us in on every side, should yet bid us advance, it would be the duty and the privilege of faith instantly to obey, believing that, ere our feet touched the water, God in our extremity would divide the sea and take us dryshod over it. If for a moment we leave the path, difficulties throng around us, troubles multiply, the smallest trials become heavy crosses, the heart will sicken at disappointment, the Spirit be grieved, and God disappointed.—*Winslow.*

Goodness a nation's defence. Abijah's goodness was towards the Lord; his goodness faced the Lord; it looked towards the glory of the Lord. It is recorded of the Catanenses that they made a stately monument to two sons

who took their aged parents upon their backs and carried them through the fire when their father's house was all in a flame. These young men were good towards their parents; but what is this to Abijah's goodness towards the Lord? He was good in the house of Jeroboam, who made all Israel to sin; yet Abijah, as the fishes which live in the salt sea are fresh, so, though he lived in a sea of wickedness, he retained his goodness towards the Lord. They say roses grow the sweeter when planted by garlic. They are sweet and rare Christians indeed who hold their goodness and grow in goodness where wickedness sits on the throne. To be wheat among tares, corn among chaff, and roses among thorns, is excellent. To be a Jonathan in Saul's court, an Obadiah in Ahab's court, an Obedmelech in Zedekiah's court, and an Abijah in Jeroboam's court, is a wonder, a miracle. To be a Lot in Sodom, an Abraham in Chaldea, a Daniel in Babylon, a Nehemiah in Damascus, and a Job in the land of Uz, is to be a saint among devils. The poets affirm that Venus never appeared so beautiful as when she sat by black Vulcan's side. Gracious souls shine most clear when they are set by black-conditioned people. Stephen's face never shone so angelically, so gloriously in the church where all were virtuous, as before the council where all were very vicious and malicious. So Abijah was a bright star, a shining sun in Jeroboam's court, which for profaneness and wickedness was a very hell.

—A substantial fence has been erected enclosing the relic of the Covenanters' stone on the summit of Duns Law. On this historic spot the standard of the Covenanting army under General Leslie was planted, and on the stone a copy of the National League and Covenant signed by the resolute leaders on the 6th June 1639. At one time the stone was prominently seen, but it is now so much reduced by the chipping and hacking of Vandalic visitors as to be scarcely visible above the green sward. Scotland has good reason to be proud of the brave exploits of its ancestors, who, whatever their

failings, were men of earnest purpose, and fought for those principles of right and justice which helped to make possible the national life of to-day. The records and memorials of their deeds should be a constant stimulus to imitate their noblest qualities. "Remove not the ancient landmarks which thy fathers have set."—*The Scottish Pulpit*.

Satan an enemy: but what of Jehovah? Satan is the enemy of every saint, and he is an indefatigable enemy. He never tires in his temptations to ensnare souls to destroy them. He "walketh about seeking whom he may devour." This denotes his main object

is to ruin the souls of men, and that he does it in a deliberate, calm, systematic way. He walks about observing times, places, circumstances, characters—all with a view to devour. He does as a lion, to whom he is compared. Observe his gentle tread, his fiery, searching eye, his subtle plans, his secret ambushes, his hidden schemes, his concealed name, nature, and character; and when he spies one of whom he can take advantage, see how the lion-nature is developed in the rush, the pounce, the seizure, the tearing, the destruction. But what must it be to the sinner to find an enemy in Jehovah?

HOMILETICS.

THE WRECK OF RELIGIOUS ORDINANCES.

(Verses 6-9.)

I. The Temple is completely demolished (vers. 6-8). In a city where there are many temples the destruction of one creates only a temporary inconvenience. Jerusalem, and indeed the Jewish nation, had but one temple, and it had the special distinction of being the only temple in the world dedicated to the worship of Jehovah. It was always in the past, and is to this day, reverently referred to as *the Temple*. It was idolised by the Jew, and was regarded as beyond the reach of possible injury. It was encircled with the rampart of Omnipotence. When menaced by the enemy, the people rallied round the sacred fane, prepared to sacrifice everything in its defence. Here they made their last stand, and fought with the fury of fanatics. But their zeal, bravery, and strategy were all in vain. In their blind infatuation they saw not that the only invincible defence, the presence of Jehovah, was withdrawn. The Temple was doomed, and was reduced to ruin with the same reckless indifference as a man would tear down a temporary shelter in his garden (ver. 6). The gates, walls, palaces, altar, sanctuary, were abandoned to utter destruction (vers. 7-9). The wreckage of such a temple was not only a metropolitan, but a national calamity. Everything was gone when the Temple was gone.

II. The religious services, formerly observed with uninterrupted regularity, are now utterly neglected. "The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion" (ver. 6). The annual and the weekly festivals are no longer observed. "There is an intensive force in its being no longer Adonai, but Jehovah, who lets them pass into oblivion. He had once instituted them for His own honour, now He lets them lie forgotten." When religion is neglected, all days are alike; there is nothing to mark off Sabbath-days from week-days, sacred days from common days. Life is reduced to the dead level of dull monotony, and the days drag on in the weary routine of comfortless and aimless labour.

"He liveth long who liveth well—
All else is being flung away;
He liveth longest who can tell
Of true things truly done each day."

Intellectual pursuits and activity are a poor substitute for genuine religion. Education not founded on religion is only a varnish. Abolish the Sabbath and

the decay of religion begins. A poet calls the Sabbath "Heaven once a week." Day of rest, of days the best.

III. The principal worshippers are in exile. "Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles" (ver. 9). The prophet has been principally occupied with the buildings of the city and Temple. Now he turns to the people, and beginning with their temporary rulers, he laments the sad fate of the king and princes who, no longer seen taking their part in the Temple service, were, like many of their people, captives in the hands of the heathen. With the best external aids it is difficult to maintain the spirituality of worship; but that difficulty is increased when all external accessories are withdrawn, and man is placed in the midst of irreligious heathenism. If he does not strive to propagate what religion he has, he will lose it. To love and worship God we must know Him, and this we cannot do till He graciously reveals Himself. The astronomer seeking to observe a star, can do nothing till he directs his telescope towards the star. The dim light of evening is with him, and by it he sets the telescope and guides it to the proper point in the heavens. But when he has pointed it to the star, the light of the star streams into the telescope, lighting it up with a new and brighter illumination. The soul of man is a telescope by which he is seeking to see and know God. The general illumination of the heart is in the world. All pagans have it. But when man has adjusted the lenses of the soul, God flashes down it, and produces an image of Himself in the poor earthly tube.

IV. The Law and the Prophets are discredited. "The law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord" (ver. 9). The Jewish law, the Torah, came to an end when it had no longer a local habitation. Its enactments were essentially those, not of a catholic, but of a national religion, and the restoration of the nation with a material temple was indispensable to its continued existence. It was only when elevated to be a catholic religion by being made spiritual that it could do without ark, temple, and a separate people (Jer. iii. 16, xxxi. 31-34). With the Torah the special gift of prophecy also ceased, since both were peculiar to the theocracy; but it was not till the establishment of Christianity that they were finally withdrawn, or rather merged in higher developments of grace. Jeremiah now laments over the temporary removal of Judah's special privileges before they had accomplished their office. At the return from exile they were for the time restored.—*Speaker's Comm.*

It is a grave calamity to church or nation to be deprived of men of insight and inspiration. These men give direction and character to the best work we are capable of doing. Much of the work of the world is done in a perfunctory manner—done to get through with it, done to get it off one's mind, done to secure the return which it promises. It is done without enthusiasm, originality, or contagious zeal. The men who give their work character, distinction, perfection, are the men whose spirit is behind their hands, giving them a new dexterity. There is no kind of work, from the merest routine to the highest creative activity, which does not receive all that gives it quality from the spirit in which it is done or fashioned. The highest and best work is done when the soul receives its "vision from the Lord" and is animated by His inspiration.

LESSONS.—1. *Religion seeks practical expression in worship and service.* 2. *The loss of religious ordinances is a national calamity.* 3. *The abuse of religious opportunities is punished by their withdrawal.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 6. "He hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden; He hath destroyed His places of the assembly." **The earthly temple:** 1.

Is but a temporary structure, however elaborately built. 2. Is desecrated when a false worship is offered. 3. When defiled, is suddenly destroyed,

as a man may tear down in a few moments a fragile hut erected for his temporary pleasure in a garden. 4. Its destruction suggests reflections on man's unfaithfulness and God's anger.

— **Perverted worship:** I. *Involves the loss of stated privileges.* "The Lord hath caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion." II. *Rouses the Divine displeasure.* "The indignation of His anger." III. *Entails regal and ecclesiastical dishonour.* "And hath despised the king and the priest."

Ver. 7. **A despoised sanctuary:** I. *Its holiest places rejected with disdain by an offended Deity.* "The Lord hath cut off his altar; he hath abhorred his sanctuary." II. *Completely abandoned to destruction.* "He hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces." III. *The wild shouts of its destroyers a strange contrast to the exultant joy of former worshippers.* "They have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast."

Ver. 8. **The implacable destroyer:** I. *Works in harmony with a fixed determination.* "The Lord hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion." II. *Carries out his purpose with systematic thoroughness.* "He hath stretched out a line; he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying." III. *Lays the strongest defences in lamentable ruin.* "Therefore he hath made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together."

Ver. 9. **National ruin complete:** I. *When all public buildings are destroyed.* "Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars." II. *When the rulers are in exile.* "Her king and her princes are among the Gentiles." III. *When religious ordinances are suspended.* "The law is no more." IV. *When religious teachers are deprived of Divine inspiration.* "Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord."

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Undercurrents cause wrecks.** A ship was stranded on the island of Sanda, in the Orkneys. It was a mystery to the captain how the

vessel got there. Being foggy at the time, he carefully consulted his chart, and both he and the mate worked up the position, their reckonings exactly agreeing as to latitude, but differing slightly in longitude. The captain had navigated the ship for ten years without any misfortune. He attributed the accident to the force of an undercurrent which carried him unknowingly out of his course, and learnt afterwards from fishermen in the locality that a current was frequently felt in that sea as far as sixty miles from land. The sea of life is intersected with dangerous undercurrents, and the watchful student will be careful to watch their tendency and strength. While on the fringe of the current, it is comparatively easy to escape, but if we drift into the midst of the irresistible swirl, we shall be hurried on to inevitable disaster. You have seen the tiny snowflakes flutter about the railway track, like lovely bits of down shook from angelic wings, and you have seen with what ease the proud locomotive scatters the fleecy morsels in the early stages of the storm; but the falling atoms increase with such persistent rapidity and accumulative force, that the panting engine is at length completely strangled, and, utterly exhausted, lies buried fathoms deep beneath the crystal mound.—*The Scottish Pulpit.*

Ordinances help religious life. Grace is like a spark in wet wood, that needs continual blowing. Would you have and keep up ardent desires? Do as they that would keep in the fire; cherish the sparks and blow them up to a flame. There is no man lives under the means of grace and under the discoveries of God and religion but has his good moods and lively motions. The waters are stirred many times; take hold of this advantage. Strengthen the things that remain and are ready to die, and blow up these sparks into a flame. God has left us enkindling means—prayer, meditation, and the Word. Observe where the bellows blow hardest, and ply that course. The more supernatural things are, there needs more diligence to preserve them. A strange plant

needs more care than a native of the soil. Worldly desires, like a nettle, breed of their own accord, but spiritual desires need a great deal of cultivating.—*Manton*.

— The Christian is compared to a merchantman who trades for rich pearls; he is to go to ordinances as the merchant sails from port to port, not to see places, but to take in his lading, some here, some there. A Christian should be as much ashamed to return empty from his traffic with ordinances as the merchant to come home without his lading. But, alas! how little is this looked after by many that pass for great professors, who are like some idle persons, that come to the market not to buy provision and carry home what they want, but to gaze and look upon what is there to be sold, to no purpose! O my brethren, take heed of this!—*Gurnall*.

The earthly temple and perverted worship. There is a great difference between religiousness and religion. Man is a religious animal, he must and will worship something. But the religion which the Bible teaches is a total change of the heart, and of the aim and purpose of life.—*Calthrop*.

— Believers are in danger of seduction into the sin and falsehood of the world. The world threatens believers not only with its enmity, but evermore with its temptations. Believers must be warned to shun the idols the world worships, and they are warned against love to the world, because love in that way very easily gets associated with sinful lusts, which are common in the world. In false prophecy it is shown that the devil, who was a murderer and liar from the beginning, threatens the Church, not only with the deadly enmity of the world, but also with its soul-destroying lies. We cannot show brotherly love to false teachers without running the risk of making ourselves partakers in their sins.—*Weiss*.

— Means—the table of the Lord, the pulpit, the pages of the Bible, the family altar, the closet oratory—are of no value unless as putting us in communication with the Spirit of God, and used as the

kite which the philosopher sends up to draw down the lightnings of the skies, or the bucket which the cottager sends down to draw up water from the well. Then, powerless as they are in themselves, they become the blessed and mighty instrument of spiritual good; the sails that catch the wind and impel the vessel on; the concave mirror that, placed before the Sun of Righteousness, gathers His beams into its burning focus to warm the coldest and melt the hardest heart; eagle-wings to raise our souls to heaven; conduits, like the pipes that bring water to our city from these Pentland Hills, to convey streams of grace, peace, and purity from their fountain in heaven to our souls on earth.—*Guthrie*.

A despised sanctuary. Those that turn their backs on God's ordinances and, in rebellion to His commandments, live in sins against conscience, can they wonder that He hides His face from them when they turn their backs on Him? When we sin, we turn our backs upon God and our face to the devil, the world, and pleasure; and can men wonder that God suffers them to melt and pine away? Let us do as the flowers do, turn themselves to the sun. Let us turn ourselves to God in meditation and prayer, striving and wrestling with Him. Look to Him, eye Him in His ordinances and promises, and have communion with Him all the ways we can. Let our souls open and shut with Him. When He hides His face, let us droop as the flowers do till the sun comes again. So, when we have not daily comfort of the Spirit in peace of conscience, let us never rest seeking God's face in His ordinances and by prayer, and that will cheer a drooping soul as the sunbeams do the flagging flowers.—*Sibbes*.

Retribution implacable. Fatalism and Atheism are preached constantly amidst the plaudits of ignorant Englishmen. How many politicians deem the matter a thing of the slightest consequence! Hume would never have set cities on fire, beheaded or hacked to pieces human beings, least of all the refined, the noble, the educated; but

he must be reckoned among those who sneeringly scattered smouldering embers and bequeathed to others death by the inevitable conflagration. Seldom has the logic of events been more complete than in the great French Revolution.—*Bampton Lecture.*

—What a diabolical invention was the “Virgin’s Kiss,” once used by the fathers of the Inquisition! The victim was pushed forward to kiss the image, when, lo! its arms embraced him in a deadly embrace, piercing his body with a hundred hidden knives. The tempting pleasures of sin offer to the unwary just such a virgin’s kiss. The sinful joys of the flesh lead, even in this world, to results most terrible, while in the world to come the daggers of remorse and despair will cut and wound beyond all remedy.—*Spurgeon.*

—Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. Punishment is a fruit that unsuspected ripens within the flower of the pleasure that concealed it.—*Emerson.*

National ruin. The whole history of Christianity shows that she is in far greater danger of being corrupted by the alliance of power than of being crushed by its opposition. Those who thrust temporal sovereignty upon her

treat her as her prototypes treated her Author. They bow the knee, and spit upon her; they cry, “Hail!” and smite her on the cheek; they put a sceptre in her hand, but it is a fragile reed; they crown her, but it is with thorns; they cover with purple the wounds which their own hands have inflicted, and inscribe magnificent letters over the cross on which they have fixed her, to perish in ignominy and pain.—*Macaulay.*

—Human society reposes on religion. Civilisation without it would be like the lights that play in the northern sky—a momentary flash on the face of darkness ere it again settled into eternal night. Wit and wisdom, sublime poetry and lofty philosophy, cannot save a nation, else ancient Greece had never perished. Valour, law, ambition, cannot preserve a people, else Rome had still been mistress of the world. The nation that loses faith in God and man loses not only its most precious jewel, but its most unifying and conserving force; has before it a

“Stygian cave forlorn
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous
wings,
And the night-raven sings.”

—*Fairbairn.*

HOMILETICS.

VOICELESS WOE.

(Verse 10.)

I. Too deep for words. “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground and keep silence.” A graphic description of sympathy and sorrow. The judges and magistrates, accustomed to occupy with dignity the judgment-seats, the thrones of the house of David, and to discourse eloquently on important points of law, now sit dejectedly upon the ground, without uttering a word. It was thus that the friends of the afflicted Job silently expressed their sympathy (Job ii. 13). There is a moment in the swing of a great sorrow when speech seems impossible—when words, if spoken, would grate upon the ear as a harsh intrusion. We prefer to be left alone and undisturbed till the pressure of the trial is relieved. We are distraught, stunned, and want time to come to ourselves. The most delicate and effectual way in which our kindest friends can help us is to be silent. No words can express our sorrow. Small griefs are eloquent enough, but great ones are dumb.

II. Expressed in abject humiliation. “They have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth.” They are stripped of their robes of state, and all their judicial dignities and prestige. They have lost their

offices and their wealth. Greatness and prosperity are exchanged for sackcloth and ashes. The loss of worldly goods brings sorrow to many. An old Latin proverb says, "Genuine are the tears shed over lost property." Those who have boasted most about their possessions, and carried their heads high in times of plenty, feel most keenly the humiliating straits of poverty. But how crushing is the humiliation when we realise we have lost all—our wealth, our friends, our national status, our religion, our God! Such a woe is voiceless indeed.

III. Overwhelms the soul with conscious shame. "The virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground." Time was when the haughty daughters of Zion courted public admiration as they tripped mincingly along the streets of Jerusalem, decked in richest apparel, and their every movement musical with tinkling ornaments (Isa. iii. 16); but now their pride is humbled, and they are bowed to the earth with conscious shame. And yet it is from this broken and dejected condition we trace the beginning of a shattered character—broken grain that man is fed; it is by bruised plants that he is restored to health. It was by broken pitchers that Gideon triumphed; on broken pieces of the ship that Paul and his companions were saved. It was by the bruised and torn bodies of the saints that the truth was made to triumph. When we examine the process of moral reform in nations and individuals, we observe how effectually God has used many broken things in the rebuilding of a shattered character—broken earthly hopes, broken bodily health, broken fortunes, broken hearts. "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 17, xxxiv. 18).

LESSONS.—1. *The greatest sorrow is speechless.* 2. *A sense of sin is a sense of personal helplessness.* 3. *The grace of God can change the greatest woe into hope and gladness.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—The loneliness of woe. You are tried alone, alone you must pass into the desert, alone you must be sifted by the world; there are moments, known only to a man's own self, when he sits by the poisoned springs of existence, "yearning for a morrow which shall free him from the strife." Let life be a life of faith; do not go timorously about inquiring what others think, what others believe, and what others say. God is near you. Throw yourself fearlessly on Him. Trembling mortal! there is an unknown might within your soul which will wake when you command it. Every son of man who would attain the true end of his being must be baptized with fire.—*F. W. Robertson.*

Dejection and despair. The more sin and corruption grow, and the man becomes fully conscious of it, the more does dejection grow also, and this changes at last into despair, which is a state of entire hopelessness, where all possibilities have vanished, all gates and ways are closed to a man. There is a despair for a hard fate, and it not

seldom happens that a man, in consequence of a single severe stroke, makes a sudden leap from his natural state of security into a state of despair, be it that he has lost a beloved human being, or his means, or in any other misfortune. Against this form of despair even heathenism had a remedy—resignation, submission to the inevitable. But the deepest despair is when a man gives up hope, not merely for this or that which he called his own, but for *himself* as a moral being. There is one sustaining and saving power—faith in God. Despair may and should become the transition to salvation, if the man only despairs of himself, but does not give up his God. In the expression of entire inability, of deepest helplessness—"O wretched man that I am"—there is latent a hope of redemption, the hope that what is impossible with man is possible with God.—*Martensen.*

The ravages of suffering. After the relief of the city of Paris, the strain and fatigue through which M. — had gone told seriously upon his health. He could not forget the horrors he had

witnessed. His face began to look worn. His hair became greyer. He looked depressed. His usual cheerful and buoyant energy disappeared, and he became listless, self-absorbed, and melancholy.

Depression. Just before George Moore's entrance into his palatial house in Cumberland, his wife died. This brought an almost intolerable sense of loneliness. One day, going to see an intimate friend, he said, "How blessed

is he amidst his lovely family! I wonder whether *he* has a coffin in any cupboard."

Solitude oppressive. When Thomas, the missionary to India, reached Calcutta, he was oppressed with a sense of loneliness. He put an advertisement in the newspapers asking if there was another Christian in the country, and begging for an interview. But there was no answer!

HOMILETICS.

THE UTTER EXHAUSTION OF GRIEF.

(Verses 11, 12.)

I. Because of the hopelessness of the desolation endured. "For the destruction of the daughter of my people" (ver. 11). The desolation is complete. Everything is destroyed—Temple, home, army, nation, wealth, food, and the very capacity to rouse themselves from the torpor of despair. When the light of hope is quenched it is impossible to put forth effort. Paralysis is destruction.

II. Because of the heart-rending spectacle of little children fainting in the streets and dying in their mothers' arms, while they vainly moan for food. "Because the children and the sucklings swoon in the streets. They say to their mothers, 'Where is corn and wine?' when their soul was poured out into their mother's bosom" (vers. 11, 12). The harrowing details here given are the most affecting that have yet been depicted by the graphic and versatile pen of the prophet. The cry—an oft-repeated cry, as the tense means—of the children for food, which the mothers were powerless to supply, only added to the tortures they already suffered. So completely prostrate were they with their misery, that they saw their children die with indifference, and could not conceal an unnatural relief when they heard their last sob. Excessive grief blunts the edge of the finest natural instincts.

III. Because all the powers for expressing emotion are completely spent. "Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth" (ver. 11). Jeremiah employs the terms in ordinary use, and as they were popularly understood. As the heart was regarded by the Jews as the seat of the intellect, so the liver, as the chief of the large viscera classed together under the name of *bowels*, was supposed to be the seat of the emotions. By the pouring out, therefore, of the liver upon the ground was meant that his feelings had entirely given way under the acuteness of his sorrow, and he could no longer restrain them.—*Speaker's Comm.* The agony of grief was passed. It was quelled by sheer exhaustion. He wept till he could weep no more. He grieved till he was incapable of feeling his grief. A tearless sorrow is the most dangerous, and the most difficult to cure.

LESSONS.—1. *There is a limit to the greatest human sorrow.* 2. *There is a moment in the experience of the sufferer when death itself is welcome.* 3. *The greatest sorrow is a painful testimony to the desolating power of sin.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Grief prostrating. Late in the afternoon of a summer day I entered a quiet graveyard where slept one of my dearest friends. It occupied the brow of a hill, which, with many a knoll and graceful undulation, sloped to the green meadow, watered by a winding stream, now catching, at its repeated curves, the rays of the setting sun. On the left was a pleasant wood, where the sturdy pine and fruit-bearing beech concealed narrow paths to cool caves and mossy banks. White birches and the trembling aspen, with the sweet-scented willow, grew upon the right, and from beyond rose the curling smoke from the cottage-houses. A robin sang its song of love and praise, a sparrow passed me bearing food to its little progeny, and the chirp of the merry grasshopper mingled with the hum of hundreds of flitting insects. But for this peace-breathing scene I had no greeting. The wild storm, thunder, rain, and darkness had been more welcome. Yielding utterly to my grief, I threw myself upon the sod, and took no heed of time. There came over me a sense of utter and hopeless desolation; an agony like that of death turned to bitterness the blessings of my lot.

—Grief is a flower as delicate and prompt to fade as happiness. Still it does not wholly die. Like the magic rose, dried and unrecognisable, a warm air breathed on it will suffice to renew its bloom.—*De Gasparin*.

Misery makes indelible impressions. The rapidity with which ideas grow old in our memories is in a direct ratio to the squares of their importance. Their apparent age runs up miraculously, like the value of diamonds, as they increase in magnitude. A great calamity, for instance, is as old as the trilobites an hour after it has happened. It stains backward through all the leaves we have turned over in the book of life before its blot of tears or of blood is dry on the page we are turning. Did you ever happen to see that most soft-spoken and velvet-handed steam-engine at the Mint? The smooth piston slides backwards and forwards as a lady might slip her delicate finger in and out of a

ring. The engine lays one of its fingers calmly but firmly upon a bit of metal; it is a coin now, and will remember that touch, and tell a new race about it, when the date upon it is crusted over with twenty centuries. So it is that a great silent-moving misery puts a new stamp on us in an hour or a moment—as sharp an impression as if it had taken half a lifetime to engrave it.—*Holmes*.

Distress exhausting. Distress is trouble of a mental kind, tending to despair. Tribulation may be described as the “fighting without,” whilst distress may be described as the “fears within.” That kind of trouble is indicated which comes upon a wrestler when his antagonist has succeeded in throwing him after a long struggle, has got his foot on him, is holding him down, and all seems to be up with him. Before, when wrestling, he was troubled, now he is distressed. Thus we see that the afflictions contemplated by the terms tribulation and distress are no light ones; and it is little wonder that, under the strain of such untoward circumstances of outward and inward trouble, the Christian should lose heart and fear the worst.

Grief excessively indulged. Ebenezer Adams, an eminent member of the Society of Friends, on visiting a lady of rank, whom he found, six months after the death of her husband, seated on a sofa covered with black cloth and in all the dignity of woe, approached her with great solemnity, and gently taking her by the hand, thus addressed her: “So, friend, I see, then, thou hast not yet forgiven God Almighty.” This reproof had so great an effect on the lady, that she immediately laid aside her violent grief, and again entered on the discharge of the duties of life.

The cure of excessive sorrow. A pale mourner stood bending over the tomb, and his tears fell fast and often. As he raised his humid eyes to heaven, he cried, “My brother! O my brother.” A sage passed that way and said, “For whom dost thou mourn?” “One,” replied he, “whom I did not sufficiently love while living, but whose inestimable

worth I now feel." "What wouldst thou do if he were restored to thee?" The mourner replied that he would never offend him by an unkind word, but would take every occasion to show his friendship, if he could but come back to his fond embrace. "Then, waste not thy time in useless grief," said the sage; "but if thou hast friends, go and cherish the living, remembering that they will one day be dead also."

— Like the passengers through the

tunnelled Alps from the dark, cold, stifling air, emerging on the broad light-flooded plains of Lombardy, it is often by a way which they know not, gloomy and underground, that the convoy is carried which God's Spirit is bringing to the wealthy place; and your present grief you will have no reason to regret if it introduce you to God's friendship and to joys which do not perish in the using. Affliction is God's message.—*Hamilton.*

HOMILETICS.

INEXPRESSIBLE RUIN.

(Verse 13.)

I. Is incomparable with any ordinary calamity. "What thing shall I take to witness for thee? What thing shall I liken to thee? What shall I equal to thee?" Great as may be our distress, it is some comfort, slight though it be, to know there are others more or less unfortunate. But in this case, the prophet has no message from Jehovah to afflicted Judah, nor can he offer the ordinary human consolation of saying that others have had equal or worse sorrow to bear. The lamentable condition of Jerusalem was unparalleled; there had been nothing like it. No city had been so highly privileged with Divine honours: no city had been so signally punished. "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow" (chap. i. 12). Jeremiah had exhausted all his powers of description. Desperate indeed must be the state of Judah when such a master of similes had to confess his inability to coin an adequate comparison.

II. Is measureless as the illimitable ocean. "For thy breach is great like the sea." In his extremity to find some comparison, the prophet mentions the sea, which, on account of its vast dimensions, its illimitable depth and breadth, could alone furnish a fitting emblem of the magnitude of the devastation effected by the Chaldeans. The indefiniteness of the figure thus used reveals at once the straits to which the writer was reduced, and the utter ruin in which Judah was overwhelmed. Thou hast a flood of afflictions, a sea of troubles, an ocean of miseries.

III. Is beyond the power of human consolation and repair. "What shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? who can heal thee?" Human words fail; human help is powerless. There is no comfort in man, or in any number of men. If there is to be any relief or restoration, it must come from God. He alone can change ruin into prosperity, misery into joy, darkness into light. A traveller in Madeira set off one morning to climb the summit of a lofty mountain to gaze upon the distant scene and enjoy the balmy air. He had a guide, and they had with difficulty ascended some two thousand feet, when a thick mist was seen descending upon them, obscuring the heavens. The traveller thought there was no hope left but to retrace their steps or be lost. But as the cloud came nearer and darkness enveloped them, the guide stepped on before, penetrating the mist, calling out every now and then, "Press on, master, press on; there's light beyond!" They did press on, and in a few minutes, emerging from the thick mist, found themselves gazing upon a scene of transcendent beauty. Above, the sky was bright and cloudless; below, the almost level cloud through which they had passed was silvered with the rays of the sun,

like a field of untrodden snow. In the darkest experiences, if we will but listen, we may hear the voice of our Divine Guide exclaiming, "Press on, press on; there is light beyond!"

LESSONS.—1. *Great indeed is the calamity that baffles human ingenuity to describe.* 2. *The nation is utterly undone when smitten by the hand of God.* 3. *God alone can repair the damage His righteous anger has inflicted.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Drifting to ruin.

Two or three miles above the falls of Niagara an Indian canoe was one day observed floating quietly along, with its paddle on its side. At first it was supposed to be empty. No one could imagine a man would expose himself to such well-known danger; but a turn of the current revealed an Indian lying asleep at the bottom. The spectators were shocked, and shouted to rouse him, but in vain. It seemed more like death than sleep which held him. All hope of rescue was gone, and they hurried along the shore in alarm to see the end. It soon came, for the torrent was now rolling so rapidly that they could scarcely keep pace with the object of their interest. At length the roar of the water, which had been hitherto almost buried within the high banks below, by a sudden change of the wind broke upon them with double violence. This dreadful noise, with which the Indian ear was so familiar, did at last arouse him. He was seen to start up and snatch his paddle. But it was too late. The same dinning sound which had roused him from insensibility told him at the same time that it was in vain to seek safety now by paddling, nor indeed had he time to try. Upright as he stood he was swept over the awful precipice, and the boat and its occupant were seen no more.

Ruin and responsibility. Julian the Apostate had for his coat of arms on his escutcheon an eagle struck through the heart with a shaft feathered from her own wing, with the motto, "Our death flies to us with our own feathers, and our wings pierce us to the very heart." The moral is, that if a man receives injury, he alone has caused it, and is alone to blame.

Unutterable ruin. Every man feels,

and not strangely, that there never were such experiences of life as his own. No joy was ever like our joy, no sorrow ever like our sorrow. Indeed, there is a kind of indignation excited in us when one likens our grief to his own. The soul is jealous of its experiences, and does not like pride to be humbled by the thought that they are common. For though we know that the world groans and travails in pain, and has done so for ages, yet a groan heard by our ear is a very different thing from a groan uttered by our mouth. The sorrows of other men seem to us like clouds of rain that empty themselves in the distance, and whose long-travelling thunder comes to us mellowed and subdued; but our own troubles are like a storm bursting right overhead and sending down its bolts upon us with direct plunge.—*Beecher.*

Ruin the punishment for sin. Fearful it is to consider that sin does not only drive us into calamity, but it makes us also impatient, and embitters our spirit in the sufferance: it cries aloud for vengeance, and so torments men before the time with such fearful outcries and horrid alarms, that their hell begins before the fire is kindled. It hinders our prayers, and consequently makes us hopeless and helpless. It perpetually affrights the conscience, unless by its frequent stripes it brings a callousness and an insensible damnation upon it. It makes us lose all that Christ purchased for us—all the blessings of His providence, the comforts of His Spirit, the aids of His grace, the light of His countenance, the hopes of His glory.—*Jeremy Taylor.*

—The pain, the disappointment, the dissatisfaction that wait on an evil course, show that the soul was not made to be the instrument of sin, but

its lofty avenger. The desolated affections, the haggard countenance, the pallid and sunken cheek, the sighings of grief, proclaim that these are ruins indeed; but they proclaim that something noble has fallen into ruin, proclaim it by signs mournful yet venerable, like the desolation of an ancient temple, like its broken walls and fallen columns, and the hollow sounds of decay that sink down heavily among its deserted recesses.—*Dewey*.

Helpless ruin appeals to our sympathy. Helplessness appealing to our pity begets affection. In one of the cottages of my country parish dwelt a poor idiot child, horrible to all eyes but her parents, and so helpless that, though older than sisters just blooming into womanhood, she lay, unable either to walk or speak, a burden on her mother's lap almost the whole day long—a heavy handful to one who had the cares of a family, and was the wife of a hard-working man, and a most painful contrast to the very roses that flung their bright clusters over the cottage window, as well as to the lark that, pleased with a grassy turf, carolled within its cage. Death, in most instances an unwelcome visitor, came at length—to her and to their relief. Relief! so I thought; and when the father came with an invitation to the funeral, so I said. Though not roughly, but inadvertently spoken, the word jarred on a tender chord; and I was more than

ever taught how helplessness begets affection in the very measure and proportion of itself, when he burst into a fit of sorrow, and, speaking of his beautiful boys and blooming girls, said, "If it had been God's will, I would have parted with any of them rather than her."—*Guthrie*.

No hope but in God. The ninth capital in the Ducal Palace at Venice is decorated with figures of the eight virtues—Faith, Hope, Charity, Justice, Temperance, Prudence, Humility, and Fortitude. The virtues of the fourteenth century are somewhat hard-featured, with vivid and living expression, and plain everyday clothes of the time. Charity has her lap full of apples, and is giving one to a little child, who stretches his arm for it across a gap in the leafage of the capital. Fortitude tears open a lion's jaws; Faith lays her hand on her breast as she beholds the cross; and Hope is praying, while above is a hand seen emerging from sunbeams—the hand of God, and the inscription above is *Spes optima in Deo*. This design is rudely imitated by the fifteenth century workmen: the virtues have lost their hard features and living expression; they have now all got Roman noses, and have had their hair curled. Their actions and emblems are, however, preserved until we come to Hope—she is still praising, but she is praising to the sun only: the hand of God is gone!—*Ruskin*.

HOMILETICS.

FALSE PROPHETS.

(Verse 14.)

I. Are self-deluded. "Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee." *Thy* prophets—they were certainly not God's prophets. Their authority was self-assumed, and they ingratiated themselves into the favour of the people by prophesying only what was agreeable to their hearers. They indulged so lavishly in lies and deceit, that they almost persuaded themselves that what they uttered was truth. But they were deluded, and their delusion was self-induced. An inveterate habit of lying vitiates the moral sense; it becomes difficult to appreciate what is true. A lie poisons the atmosphere wherever it circulates. It has no legs and cannot stand, but it has wings and can fly far and wide.

II. Have no insight into the real cause of national calamities, and their teaching is powerless to prevent them. "They have not discovered thine

iniquity, to turn away thy captivity." The Syriac renders the words thus: *They have not disclosed to thee thy sins, that so thou mightest repent, and I might have turned away thy captivity.* They were so demoralised by the habitual practice of falsehood, that they were incompetent to judge the cause and drift of the national troubles. They could not see that disobedience to God was at the root of the general distress; or, if they did, they saw so little evil in it, or danger from it, that they did not deem it necessary to alarm the people by any words of warning. Had they been able to read the signs of the times and to act with promptness and fidelity in urging the people to repentance, Israel's chastisement might have been averted. When responsible leaders are unfaithful, and abuse their trust by deceiving others, the misguided nation rushes on to its doom.

III. Invent messages full of deceit. "But have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment." The word *burdens* does not mean here prophecies of a minatory character, for evidently the false prophets assured the people of prosperity and deliverance. The word is used in a contemptuous sense. The *burdens*, so different from the Divine message laid as a burden on the conscience of the genuine prophet, were, in this case, mere pretence, false, empty, and utterly inadequate to remove "the causes of banishment." The false prophets, in their attempt to account for the captivity, invented any cause but the real one—the apostasy of the people. Deceit produces darker shades of deceit. One lie must be quickly thatched with another, or it will soon rain through. The way of falsehood is tortuous. A deaf and dumb boy being asked, "What is truth?" replied by thrusting his finger forward in a straight line. When asked, "What is falsehood?" he made a zigzag motion with his finger. The result of false teaching is disintegration, banishment, *a driving out*. Every lie, great or small, is the brink of a precipice, the depth of which nothing but Omniscience can fathom. The poet Campbell calls it, "The torrent's smoothness, ere it dash below."

- LESSONS.—1. *The true prophet receives his commission directly from God.*
 2. *While the prophet is faithful to his Divine calling he is preserved from error.*
 3. *The false prophet deceives himself as well as others.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—A false prophet.

"The bigot theologian, in minute
 Distinctions skilled, and doctrines un-reduced
 To practice; in debate how loud! how long!
 How dexterous! in Christian love, how cold!
 His vain conceits were orthodox alone.
 The immutable and heavenly truth revealed
 By God was nought to him; he had an art,
 A kind of hellish charm, that made the lips
 Of truth speak falsehood; to his liking
 turned

The meaning of the text; made trifles seem
 The marrow of salvation;

Proved still his reasoning best, and his belief,
 Though propped on fancies wild as mad-
 men's dreams,

Most rational, most Scriptural, most sound;
 With mortal heresy denouncing all

Who in his arguments could see no force.

He proved all creeds false but his own, and
 found

At last his own most false—most false,
 because

He spent his time to prove all others so."

—*Pollok.*

False doctrine. A man holding false and pernicious doctrines preached

at a village chapel, and endeavoured to convince a large congregation that there is no punishment after death. At the close of the discourse he informed the people he would preach there again in four weeks, if they wished. A respectable merchant rose and said, "Sir, if your doctrine is true, we do not need you; and if it is false, we do not want you."

False teaching dangerous when mixed with truth. Falsehood is never so successful as when she baits her hook with truth. No opinions so fatally mislead us as those that are not wholly wrong, as no watches so effectually deceive the wearer as those that are sometimes right.—*Colton.*

—Error is never so dangerous as when it is the alloy of truth. Pure error would be rejected; but error mixed with truth makes use of the truth as a pioneer for it, and gets introduction

where otherwise it would **have** none. Poison is never **so** dangerous as when mixed up with food; error is never so likely to do mischief as when it comes to us under the pretensions and patronage of that which is true.—*Cumming*.

Faith in falsehood disastrous.—When the English army under Harold, and the Norman under William the Conqueror, were set in array for that fearful conflict which decided the fate of the two armies and the political destinies of Great Britain, William, perceiving that he could not by a fair attack move the solid columns of the English ranks, had recourse to a false movement in order to gain the victory. He gave orders that one flank of his army should feign to be flying from the field in disorder. The officers of the English army believed the falsehood, pursued them, and were cut off. A second time a false movement was made in another part of the field. The English again believed, pursued, and were

cut off. By these movements the fortunes of the day were determined. Although the English had the evidence of their senses, yet they were led to believe a falsehood. They acted in view of it. The consequence was the destruction of a great part of their army, and the establishment of the Norman power in England. It is an incontrovertible fact that the whole heathen world, ancient and modern, have believed in and worshipped unholy beings as gods. In consequence of believing falsehood concerning the character of God, all heathendom at the present hour is filled with ignorance, impurity, and crime.—*J. B. Walker*.

Falsehood.

“I scorn this hated scene
Of masking and disguise,
Where men on men still gleam
With falseness in their eyes:
Where all is counterfeit,
And truth hath never say;
Where hearts themselves do cheat,
Concealing hope's decay.”—*Motherwell*.

HOMILETICS.

THE HEARTLESS TRIUMPH OF THE SCORNER.

(Verses 15-17.)

I. Expressed in aggravated taunts (ver. 15). The conquerors heap insult upon insult on the fallen city. They employ all the familiar signs expressive of contempt and derision. They clap their hands, they hiss, they wag their heads, and with a scornful curl of the lip they ask, “Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?” Jerusalem had acquired a world-wide renown. It was the pride of the Jew, the dread of its subject tribes, the envy of surrounding nations. No city had been so signally honoured of Heaven; and now that it was prone in the dust, its foes united in a wild chorus of fiendish jubilation. How vividly does this verse remind us of the scene around the cross of the world's Redeemer! (Matt. xxvii. 39-44; Mark xv. 29-32; Luke xxiii. 35-37). It is heartless and wicked to make sport of the miseries of others, and is a cruel aggravation of those miseries. The triumph of the wicked is short. Their hollow-ringing laughter is as “the crackling of thorns under a pot.” Their taunts and gibes fall back upon themselves. Our unkind words come home to roost.

II. Savagely exults in the havoc that has been ardently desired (ver. 16). The intensity of the enemy's exultation is shown by the heaping up of unconnected words, with each of which its own proper object must be supplied. We have found what we sought, have seen what we looked for; our hopes and longings are all fulfilled.—*Speaker's Commentary*. The enemies of Zion eagerly watched for her downfall, they earnestly desired it, they maliciously helped to bring it about; and now it had come, their maddened hilarity and scorn knew no bounds. The truly brave never exult over the defeat of their worst foes. They have often been

known to weep over the devastation they have themselves created. It is inhuman to chuckle over the sufferings of others. It is a depth of demoralisation reached only by the cowardly and craven-hearted.

III. The fulfilment of Divine threatenings against national unfaithfulness (ver. 17). *The ruin of Jerusalem, over which her adversaries so savagely rejoiced,* was no accidental or unforeseen event. It was the fulfilment of the Divine purpose, of which Israel had been so often forewarned from the days of old. It was distinctly foretold that if Israel forsook Jehovah and lapsed into idolatry, they would be punished with all the miseries of a siege, ending in national overthrow (Lev. xxvi. 14-39; Deut. xxviii. 15-68). The contemptuous scorn of their enemies emphasised their punishment, and testified to the exactness with which the Divine threatenings against disobedience had been fulfilled. The Divine word, whether in threat or promise, never fails. God is unchangeably faithful both in mercy and in judgment.

LESSONS.—1. *The wicked ever gloat over the downfall of the good.* 2. *The gibes of the scorner are a bitter ingredient in the punishment of the unfaithful.* 3. *The taunts of the wicked have no power to injure the truly righteous.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 15, 16. The world's treatment of its suffering Redeemer: 1. A wild tempest of unreasoning scorn, hatred, and exultation. 2. A mournful evidence of the intense acrimony of sin. 3. Does not prevent the unselfish working out of its sublime redemption.

Ver. 17. The Divine threatenings of judgment: I. *Unaffected by the lapse of time.* "He hath fulfilled His word that He had commanded in the days of old." II. *Are carried out with relentless certainty.* "He hath thrown down and hath not pitied." III. *Always finds agents willing to execute them.* "He hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee; He hath set up the horn of thine adversaries."

ILLUSTRATIONS. — Triumph premature. During the reign of Henry VIII., the Pope, angry at the English monarch's resistance, called a council in Rome, at which it was resolved that the Emperor of Germany should invade England, and that Henry should be deposed. So rejoiced was the Papal party, that they illuminated Rome; cannons were fired, bonfires lighted, and great bodies of men paraded the streets shouting, "The Empire and Spain." Already, in their eager expectation, England was a second Netherlands, a captured province under the

regency of Catherine or Mary. How bitterly these expectations were overthrown history too well declares.

Scorn, not to be dreaded.

"Ridicule is a weak weapon when levelled at a strong mind;

But common men are cowards, and dread an empty laugh.

Betray mean terror of ridicule, thou shalt find fools enough to mock thee;

But answer thou their laughter with contempt,

And the scoffers will lick thy feet."

—*Tupper.*

A scoffer non-plussed. On a certain occasion, in the presence of a vast and brilliant assemblage, a person more noted for his self-esteem than for his learning was speaking against the Christian religion in terms of the severest scorn and derision. The celebrated Dr. Belknap, overhearing the orator, stepped up to him and asked, "Well, sir, have you found a religion that is better?" The scoffer, considerably abashed by this unlooked-for question, was forced to acknowledge that thus far he had not. "Well," responded the Doctor, "when you have, let me know, and I will join you in adopting it." The rebuke was as wise as it was just.

Sarcasm destroys friendship. Life is full of paradoxes. There are some slight causes which will destroy the strongest friendship. Great causes will

not always impair it. A sarcastic and disparaging speech made by a friend concerning his friend in his absence, and repeated by some mischief-maker, will invariably disturb friendship; while an angry altercation, or some injury to person or to property, will often leave friendship unharmed. When alienation begins, it increases at a very rapid rate. The rust spot multiplies apace. The mildew spreads quickly. The rift in the lute becomes longer and longer. —*S. Martin.*

The Redeemer's sufferings unique. Did Christ then merely suffer as any other man has done? Suffering is a question of nature. The educated man suffers more than the uneducated man; the poet probably suffers more than the mathematician; the commanding officer suffers more in a defeat than the common soldier. The more life the more suffering, the billows of sorrow being in proportion to the volume of our manhood. Now Jesus Christ was not merely a man. He was man, and by the very compass of His manhood He suffered more than any mortal can endure. The storm may pass as fiercely over the shallow lake as over the At-

lantic, but by its very volume the latter is more terribly shaken. No other man had come with Christ's ideas; in no other man was the element of self so entirely abnegated; no other man had offered such opposition to diabolical rule. All these circumstances combine to render Christ's sufferings unique, yet not one of them puts Christ so far away as to prevent us finding in His suffering unfailing solace and strength. — *Dr. Parker.*

Divine punishment certain. Those who made light of the invitation to the supper mentioned in the Gospel were shut out. The sceptical Pilate ended a miserable, hopeless life by suicide. The rich man went on living splendidly, giving banquets, pampering his body, until one day he died and was buried, and awoke in torment to know its reality at last. The people in Noah's days lived securely and indifferent, "until the flood came and took them all away." On the inhabitants of Sodom the sun was shining when Lot went out of the city; but the same day it rained fire and brimstone, and destroyed them all.

HOMILETICS.

A CALL TO PRAYER.

(Verses 18, 19.)

I. Addressed to a city suffering the miseries of a desolating siege. "Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion!" (ver. 18). It sounds strange thus to appeal to the *wall* of Zion—to pray so passionately that tears may run down like a river. But this is quite after the manner of Jeremiah and other sacred writers (comp. ver. 8; Isa. xiv. 31; Jer. xxii. 29; Hab. ii. 11; Luke xix. 40). Carried away with an outburst of sorrow, "the prophet suddenly addresses the wall, which had so long been their shelter and defence, and bids it, as the representative of the people who had dwelt secure under its protection, to shed floods of tears on their behalf. Broken up by the enemy, it could be their guardian no longer, but by its ruins it might still cry unto the Lord in their behalf." However great may be our distress, it is always wise to promptly obey the summons to pray. Prayer brings moral strength and brightens the hope of rescue.

II. To be mingled with much weeping. "Let tears run down like a river day and night; give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease" (ver. 18). Like a river, a brook, or torrent, rushing along furiously at one time and afterwards dried up. In the nature of things weeping cannot be incessant. Like a torrent, it gushes out in floods of tears, and, though ceasing at intervals, it is in this instance to be often repeated. Reasons for frequent weeping will be found

in the prolonged continuance of the misery. Suffering is apt to stupify and harden, if the heart is not softened with tears. Prayer is the more genuine when accompanied with godly sorrow.

III. **To be expressed with loud cries throughout the night-watches.** "Arise, cry out in the night; in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord" (ver. 19). At the beginning of each night-watch means all the night through. There are crises in life, times of trouble and peril, when the time usually devoted to sleep may be fitly employed in earnest, agonising prayer. Such a time had come in the history of Judah; such a time comes to most. There is a pathetic tenderness of sorrow in the night-moanings and cries of the soul, and it is then we are often conscious of the special nearness of Divine help.

"Hours spent with pain and Thee
Lost hours have never seemed;
No! those are lost which but might be
From earth for heaven redeemed.

For weeping, wakeful eyes
Instinctive look above,
And catch, through openings in the skies,
Thy beams, unslumbering Love!"

IV. **To be offered especially on behalf of perishing children.** "Lift up thy hands towards Him for the life of thy young children that faint for hunger at the top of every street" (ver. 19). Among the most heart-rending miseries of the siege was the spectacle of little children prostrate in the streets slowly dying of starvation. You cannot enter a street in any part of the city but this sad sight meets the eye. The lifting up of the hands is not only the attitude and symbol of prayer, but indicates earnestness in supplication. The sufferings of helpless children appeal to the hardest heart, and when it is impossible to render any other help, we are called upon to pray for them. When our children are in extremity, so are we. Prayer is the only refuge, apart from which there is nothing but wretchedness and despair.

LESSONS.—1. *Our daily necessities are a constant call to prayer.* 2. *Misery finds relief in prayer.* 3. *The young should ever be the subject of earnest prayer.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 19. **A night of prayer:** 1. Necessary in circumstances of special peril. 2. Often characterised by intense earnestness. 3. Familiar to many an anxious mother pleading for the salvation of her child.

— **Watch-Night service.** I. *It is never too soon to pray.* There is no reason why you should delay to the morning light. "In the beginning of the night-watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord." How many young persons imagine that religion is a thing for age, or at least for maturity! They do not want their young shoulders galled with an early burden; they do not think it is true that "it is good for a man to bear the

yoke in his youth;" and they forget that that "yoke is easy" and that "burden is light." God hears children. He called Samuel when he was but a child. We have had our Josiahs, we have had our Timothys; we have seen those in early youth brought to the Saviour. Young man, it is not too soon. II. *It is not too late to cry to the Lord.* If the sun be set and the watches of the night have commenced their round, the mercy-seat is open. No shop is open so late as the House of Mercy. The devil has two tricks with men. Sometimes he puts their clock a little backward, and says, "Stop! there is time enough yet;" and when that does not answer, he turns the hands on,

and cries out, "Too late! too late!" Within another fifteen minutes another year shall have come; but if the Spirit of God calls you this year, He will not call you too late in the year. If to the last second you should live, if God the Holy Ghost calls you then, He will not have called you too late. The darkness of night is gathering; it is coming on, and you are near death. Arise, sleeper, arise! Thou art now taking the last nap of death. III. *We cannot pray too vehemently.* "Cry out in the night." God loves earnest prayers. He loves impetuous prayers, vehement prayers. Let a man preach, if he dare, coldly and slowly, but never let him pray so. Those who cry with weak voices, who do not cry aloud, must not expect to get a blessing. When you go to Mercy's gate, do not give a gentle tap like a lady, do not give a single knock like a beggar, but take the knocker and rap hard till the very door seems to shake. Rap with all your might, and recollect that God loveth those who knock hard at Mercy's gate. IV. *We cannot pray too simply.* "Pour out your hearts before Him." Not pour out your fine words, not pour out your beautiful periods, but pour out *your hearts*. "I dare not," says one; "there is black stuff in my heart." Out with it, then; it is better out than in. "I cannot pray as I could wish," says another; "my crying out is a feeble one." When you pour out water, it does not make much noise. So you can "pour out your heart like water," and it will run away, and you can scarcely know it. There is many a prayer uttered in a garret, down in a cellar, or in some lonely place where the cobbler sits mending his shoes beneath a window, which the world does not hear, but the Lord hears it. Pour out your heart like water by confessing your sins, by begging the Lord to have mercy on you for Christ's sake. And when it is all poured out, He will come and fill it again. Listen for one moment to the ticking of that clock. It is the beating of the pulse of eternity; it is the footstep of death pursuing you. Time is precious, and when we have

little of it, it is more precious. You will soon enter another year. This year will have gone in a few seconds. Where will the next year be spent?—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—A mute summons to prayer. Venice may well call upon us to note with reverence, that of all the towers which are still seen rising like a branchless forest from her islands, there is but one whose office was other than that of summoning to prayer, and that one was a watch-tower only.—*Ruskin.*

Tearful intercession irresistible. Miss Gratz—supposed to have been the original of Rebecca in "Ivanhoe"—was nursing her grandfather in his last illness. Calling her to him one day, he said, "What can I do for you, my dear child?" Turning upon him her beautiful eyes filled with tears, she said in a tone of earnest entreaty, "Grandfather, forgive Aunt Shinah." This was a daughter who had been long estranged because of her marriage with a Gentile. The old man sought his grand-daughter's hand, pressed it, and, after a silence, said in a broken voice, "Send for her." In due course the lady came, received her father's forgiveness and blessing, and when, a few days later, he breathed his last, the arms of his long-estranged child were about him, while Rebecca Gratz sat silently at his side.

Prayer necessary for service. Bees suffer sadly from famine during the dry years which occasionally occur in the southern and middle portions of California. If the rainfall amounts only to three or four inches, instead of from twelve to twenty, as in ordinary seasons, then sheep and cattle die in thousands, and so do these small winged cattle, unless they are carefully fed or removed to other pastures. No flowers, no honey; no rain, no food. They who teach others must themselves feed on the truths they declare. Failure to commune with God will give the poverty-stroke to our endeavours to bless man.

Sorrow drives men to prayer.

“ ‘There is no God,’ the foolish saith,
 But none ‘There is no sorrow ;’
 And Nature oft the cry of faith
 In bitter need will borrow :
 Eyes which the preacher could not school,
 By wayside graves are raised,
 And lips say ‘God be pitiful,’
 Who ne’er said ‘God be praised !’
 Be pitiful, O God !”

—*Mrs. Browning.*

“Jesus, pitying Saviour, hear me ;
 Draw Thou near me ;
 Turn Thee, Lord, in grace to me ;
 For Thou knowest all my sorrow ;
 Night and morrow
 Doth my cry go up to Thee.
 Peace I cannot find : O take me,
 Lord, and make me
 From the yoke of evil free ;
 Calm this longing never-sleeping,
 Still my weeping,
 Grant me hope once more in Thee.”

—*Tersteegen.*

Sympathy with youth. George Moore, merchant and philanthropist, was the constant resort of young men wanting situations. If he could not provide for them in his own warehouse, he endeavoured to find situations for them amongst his friends. He took no end of trouble about this business. After his young friends had obtained employment, he continued to look after them. He took down their names and addresses in a special red book kept for the purpose, and repeatedly asked them to dine with him on Sunday afternoons. He usually requested that they should go to some church or chapel in the evening.

A mother's prayer. After Augustine had lost faith in Manichæism, he found himself in the same situation as he was ten years before. There was the same longing after truth, but linked now with a feeling of desolation, a bitter sense of deception, and a large measure of scepticism. He was no longer at ease in Carthage, and resolved on a journey to Rome, where he ventured to hope for a more brilliant and profitable career as a rhetorician. His mother wished either to prevent his going, or to go with him. While she spent a night in the Church of the Martyr, praying and wrestling with God in tears to prevent the voyage, Augustine sailed for the coast of Italy, and his deceived mother found herself the next morning alone on the sea-shore. She had learned, however, the heavenly art of forgiving, and believing also where she could not see. In quiet resignation she returned to the city, and continued to pray for the salvation of her son. Though meaning well, she this time erred in her prayer, for the journey of Augustine was the means of his salvation. The denial of the prayer was, in fact, the answering of it. Instead of the husk, God granted rather the substance of her petition in the conversion of her son. “Therefore,” says he, “hadst Thou, O God, regard to the aim and essence of her desires, and didst not do what she then prayed for, that Thou mightest do for me what she continually implored.”—*Schaff.*

HOMILETICS.**A PRAYER FOR DIVINE COMPASSION.**

(Verses 20–22.)

I. Reminding Jehovah of His former favour to the sufferers. “Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this” (ver. 20). The prophet seems to feel that if God would only look and recall to mind who they were who were suffering, He would surely have pity. They are not the heathen, but His own people, the seed of Abraham, whom He raised from obscurity and endowed with unexampled blessings. Their present misery was all the more painful to endure when contrasted with their former affluence and power, and would surely move the compassion of Him who had so often interposed on their behalf. It is a great help in prayer to remind God of His former loving-kindness. Every blessing we receive from God increases His interest in our welfare. Every act of disobedience is a sin against Infinite Love.

II. Uttered from the midst of appalling distress (vers. 20, 21). In these verses we have a vivid description of the suffering and desolation occasioned by the siege. In the extreme exigencies of famine the most horrible cannibalism was practised: the pangs of hunger devoured maternal affection, and mothers devoured their newly-born infants. Even this had been predicted as the fruit of disobedience (Deut. xxviii. 53). How little do we appreciate the great goodness of God in providing daily food for ourselves and our children! Everywhere in the city were visible the most ghastly scenes of indiscriminate massacre—"priest and prophet, young and old, virgins and young men," lay in promiscuous heaps of the slain. If prayer can reach heaven, it must surely be when ascending from the midst of anguish like this. The greater the distress we are in, the more urgent and importunate should be our prayers.

III. Wrung from a people terrified with startling proofs of the Divine anger. "Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the Lord's anger none escaped or remained" (ver. 22). Jeremiah had often threatened the terrors of God's wrath in the destruction of the nation, if the people persisted in idolatry; but they heeded not. They made jests of his warnings, and their earnest repetition only increased their ridicule. But when they saw Jerusalem hemmed round by the victorious Chaldeans, and the utter ruin that followed, they then saw the portentous meaning of "the terrors" that had been so often threatened and so recklessly despised. The anger of the Lord became to them a solemn reality, and, overwhelmed with confusion and fear, they cry for help. Whatever impels the soul to pray is a blessing. The beginning of prayer may rise from our fears; but as we persevere, it will be actuated by nobler motives. All that prayer can do is to bring our case before God. We must then leave it there with Him, and say, "Thy will be done."

LESSONS.—1. *The final appeal of the helpless is to God.* 2. *When distress induces prayer, deliverance is at hand.* 3. *Jehovah is graciously moved to help by human entreaty.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 20. "Behold, O Lord, and consider to whom Thou hast done this." **The Divine pity:** 1. Earnestly implored by a suffering people. 2. Invoked on the ground of former kindnesses, which, it is acknowledged, have been abused. 3. Is never appealed to in vain.

Ver. 22. **The tyranny of fear:** 1. Realised when beset by a powerful enemy. 2. When the enemy is summoned and directed by One whom we have consciously offended. 3. When we are witnesses of cruelties we are powerless to prevent.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Prayer. It is helplessness casting itself on power. It is infirmity leaning on strength, and misery wooing bliss. It is the flight of the soul to the bosom of God, and the spirit soaring upward and claiming nativity beyond the stars. It is the

soaring eagle mounting upward in its flight, and with steady gaze pursuing the track till lost to all below. It is the roving wanderer looking towards his abiding-place, where are all his treasures and his gold. It is the prisoner pleading for release. It is the mariner of a dangerous sea, upon the reeling topmast, descriing the broad and quiet haven of repose. It is the soul, oppressed by earthly soarings, escaping to a broader and purer sphere, and bathing its plumes in the ethereal and eternal.—*Wells.*

Yearning for God.—When my blood flows like wine, when all is ease and prosperity, when the sky is blue and birds sing and flowers blossom, and my life is an anthem moving in time and tune, then this world's joy and affection suffice. But when a change comes, when I am weary and disappointed, when the skies lower into a

sombre night, when there is no song of bird, and the perfume of flowers is but their dying breath, when all is sun-setting and autumn, then I yearn for Him who sits with the summer of love in His soul, and feel that all earthly affection is but a glow-worm light compared to that which blazes with such effulgence in the heart of God. — *Beecher*.

Divine compassion. We often suffer more on account of other's troubles than they themselves do in those troubles, for both love and sorrow take their measure as much from the capacity of the nature that experiences them as from the power of the externally exciting cause. How much one suffers with or for another does not depend altogether upon how much that other is suffering, but upon how much that nature which sympathises has with which to suffer. God feels with us, so that our experiences throw their waves upon the shore of His soul. He carries us so near to His heart that all our feelings which are of any moment produce their effects in some degree in His bosom. It seems very strange that the Maker of all the earth should permit Himself to be a participant in all the petty experiences that belong to any human life. No man would have dared to conceive such an idea of God, and to have believed any such thing as that, if it had not been revealed in unequivocal terms.

The compassion of Jesus. Luther said, "I would run into the arms of Christ if He stood with a drawn sword in His hands." John Butterworth, reading this, resolved to do likewise, and found, as every venturing sinner does, no sword in the hands of Jesus, but open arms and a hearty welcome. Christ's proclamation, for ever sounding forth to every burdened heart, is "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He demonstrated His marvellous compassion by dying for us. He will not now repulse the approach or disregard the cry of the needy.

The influence of fear. There is a virtuous fear, which is the effect of

faith; and there is a vicious fear, which is the product of doubt. The former leads to hope, as relying on God, in whom we believe; the latter inclines to despair, as not relying on God, in whom we do not believe. Persons of the one character fear to lose God; persons of the other character fear to find Him. — *Pascal*.

Slavish and filial fear. There are two kinds of fear—one full of suspicious watchfulness, of anxious apprehension, of trepidation, terror, and dismay; the other such as can dwell in the same heart with confidence and love, and is but another form of reverence. Filial fear of God is a duty; slavish and servile dread of Him is a sin. Filial fear shrinks from sin; servile fear only from the smart of punishment. Filial fear keeps men from departing from the living God, servile fear drives them from Him. By filial fear men are made like the man Christ Jesus; by servile fear they may be scared from iniquity, as the wolf from the sheepfold by the shepherd's gun; but it does no more to make them holy than the fright does to destroy the wolf's ferocity. Filial fear animates us to avoid whatever would be offensive to our Heavenly Father, and, if the expression may be allowed, to consult His feelings and desires; but servile fear, as it springs from selfishness, causes us only to care for ourselves, and at best makes us not better, but only a little more prudent than the devil. — *Bertram*.

The greatest fear. When a city is compassed round about with a wall that is impregnable, it will be opened still towards heaven, and therefore cannot be out of danger if God be an enemy. For all their walls and bars, God could rain fire and brimstone upon the Sodomites out of heaven. Alexander asked the Scythians what they were most afraid of, thinking they would say of himself, who was so victorious everywhere. But they answered scoffingly they were most afraid lest heaven should fall upon them. We, indeed, need not fear anything but this only, lest the heaven should fall upon us, lest God should be our enemy. — *J. Stoughton*.

CHAPTER III.

AN IDEAL REPRESENTATION OF NATIONAL SORROW.

The middle elegy is, not only in structure but also in tone, readily distinguished from the other four. An element of personality is manifest in it which is not in them. The poet concentrates in himself all forms of the calamities which he laments. Some of these seem too sharp and heavy to be experienced by a single individual, and the doubt is turned into a certainty when he associates himself once and again with others. He is a member of a body. In this feature a significant proof is indicated of that unfolding form of prophecy in which the whole community of Israel, or an undefined part of it, is regarded as represented by a special person—the Servant whose experiences are hardly so much his own as those of his people. He stands apart from them by the peculiarities of his condition, but he draws to himself all their sorrows and pains, and that burden impels him to act as an advocate on their behalf before Jehovah. As we read such things we are reminded of the resemblance which they bear to the course of the prophet Jeremiah. He was “separated” from his nation, but became a participant of the terrible doom he announced. He would not stand off from his people when he might have gone with the Babylonian Captain of the Guard. It was his *pure conscience* and sensitive heart which realised the *fierce anger of the Lord* against the sins which had corrupted the conscience and heart of his fellow-countrymen. It was for their sakes, he said, *My heart is faint within me. . . . For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black.* His position was a forecast of that mightier Servant who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

The progress of the poem presents a strange tumult of thought. There is arraignment of God's dealings and acknowledgment of His mercies; impatience at his sufferings, which does not crowd out his patience; wonder why the Lord should send such punishments, and confession of sins with little hope that it would pave the way for pardon. Yet is not this a true portrait of each soul that is *striving against sin* in himself and others? *Without fighting, within fears.*

The first part of the chapter sets forth the soul-sufferings of the godly in their cheerless and hopeless misery (vers. 1–18); then it ascends to hope by meditation on the compassion of God (vers. 19–39); next is the recognition of God's justice in the punishment, but the intensity of which, through the malice of enemies, the Lord cannot pass by (vers. 40–54); and last, prayer that He would send help and take vengeance on the enemy (vers. 55–66).

(N) Ver. 1. The author writes as if his own person was the object on which all the troubles had been inflicted. *I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath.* The repression of the name of the wielder of the rod is remarkable in view of its reiteration in Chapter II. That here it was of set purpose seems proved by the persistent omission till ver. 18, and is probably to be accounted for by the poet's wish to indicate a sort of climax to a soul-struggle in which he could not take the name of Jehovah till all appeared lost. The rod signifies the means by which the affliction was produced, and is illustrated by the phrase, *The Assyrian is the rod of mine anger* (Isa. x. 5).

Ver. 2. The unnamed had accumulated affliction. *He has led and caused me to walk in darkness and not in light,* in perplexity as well as misery.

Ver. 3. And it was continuously carried on. *Surely against me he turns his hand again and again all the day.*

(2) Ver. 4. Details as to how the writer suffered. *My flesh and my skin he has worn out, he has broken my bones.* Bodily exhaustion and racking pains consume the vital forces.

Ver. 5. Obstruction is placed so that I may not find a change. *He has builded against me, shut me in as if He was besieging me behind and before with hurting and wearying obstacles, gall and travail.*

Ver. 6. Darkness was added. *He has made me to dwell in dark places, dismal and without hope, as those in which lay the for ever dead,* those who had gone into Sheol, and for whom there is no way of return.

(2) Ver. 7. Freedom is taken away by close confinement and a heavy chain.

Ver. 8. Prisoner though I am, I can make entreaties for relief. *I cry and call for help, but no response is given; he shutteth out my prayer;* he had used means to prevent the petitions reaching him, as if the barriers were not fabricated by the sins of the petitioner!

Ver. 9. As a traveller, I am brought to a standstill. *He has fenced up my ways with hewn stone,* and there is a necessity to turn aside to crooked paths, which lead to and fro without purpose.

(7) Ver. 10. Difficulties had been embarrassing, but dangers were also added. *In the crooked paths the bear and the lion lurked, and he is there, like them, lying in wait for me.*

Ver. 11. I wandered aimlessly. *He has led me astray and then he has torn me in pieces, has made me desolate, left me mangled and alone.*

Ver. 12. Not only such rending as that by beasts of prey has distressed me, but also mal-

treatment by men. I have been treated as the quarry of a hunter. He set me as a mark for the arrow.

(7) Ver. 13. There is no miss when God aims at a mark. He has made the sons of his quiver to enter into my reins; the central points of vital action were sore wounded.

Ver. 14. The figure is hardly changed. Perhaps a laughing-stock to all my people, their song all the day, may be regarded as the shaft which went to the quick. Jeremiah calls a deceiving tongue a deadly arrow (ix. 8). They who should have stood by him, as partaking of the same afflictions, hurled at him bolts of ridicule in jaunty songs. Another reading ascribes the mocking to all peoples, not to his fellow-countrymen.

Ver. 15. The nutriment and comfort which I needed were replaced by adversities which I endured to the utmost extent bearable. He has filled me with bitteresses—different kinds of sufferings—and sated me with wormwood.

(1) Ver. 16. In respect to means of nourishment, I have been still further exasperated. Also he has broken my teeth with gravel; either that which was chewed was full of gritty sand, or for bread he had stones given him. A strange work for the Father! He has covered me with ashes, I am one who mourneth in bitterness.

Ver. 17. Notwithstanding all my afflictions, I might have been calm and hopeful, but the culminating point of all I have to sustain is the conviction that I am put far from God. Is it not a piteous condition which may extort complaint of Thyself? Thou hast cast off my soul from peace. So dense is this outer darkness, that any recollection of ever being in comfort has faded away, I forget good.

Ver. 18. This reads like an account of the climax to the trials undergone. I said, as if talking to myself, My strength is perished, and my expectation from Jehovah. The future is void of good. I am unable to look for anything from Him. In Jah Jehovah is everlasting strength, but I do not perceive it. I have lost the direction towards Him.

This recalling of the name at last seems to turn the current of thought. I must not let go trust in Him. I must tell Him the desires of my heart.

The sorrow according to God is a product of His wisdom and love. "Sorrow is God's last message to man; it is God speaking in emphasis. He who abuses it shows that he can shut his ears when God speaks loudest. Therefore heartlessness or impenitence after sorrow is more dangerous than intemperance in joy; its results are always more tragic. . . . God's wrath is an ennobling, not a stupefying doctrine" (Smith). Nor is it discouraging to leal-hearted men, though menacing.

(f) Vers. 19-21. The name of Jehovah is as a rallying-call to reject the rash expression of despair just heard, and stirs up thoughts of what God's character is. The author begins to feel that he can have recourse to a prayer to be remembered, and so these verses mark the passage from hopeless bafflings with no small storm to the hopeful sound of a favouring breeze.

Ver. 19. Remember my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the gall; a reminiscence of salient points in the sufferings he had passed through, and which might evoke the compassion and power of the All-merciful.

Ver. 20. The correct translation of this verse is uncertain, and preference is given to this. Remembering, thou wilt remember all those things; also [that] my soul is cast down in me. I am heavy laden. I have no might. Either I shall be overwhelmed and sink into deep mire where there is no standing, or else out of weakness be made strong by Thee. It would be like Thee to make haste to help me.

Ver. 21. This I will bring back to my heart, this thought, that Thou wilt not be always wroth, for the spirit would fail before Thee and the souls which thou hast made, has taken full possession of my inner man; therefore I will hope. There must be a blessing in store, for God pities and God rules in exhaustless grace. Out of the darkest depression He can lift to a light in which I may walk and never be ashamed of my hope.

(7) Ver. 22. The hopefulness which had begun to lift a desponding soul points to the ground on which it may become secure. Its hazy outlook is seeming to clear, and, as in all true ideas of human relationship to God, that which is felt as a privilege for the individual is regarded to be a privilege for all souls also who seek the Lord. One voices the confession of the remnant of Israel thus: Jehovah's mercies, not in one form, but in many forms they affect men, and, whether shown to individuals or communities, they counteract the wasting tendencies of evil. A striking proof of His varied graciousness is manifest in that we are not consumed. More will follow. His continuous action is a token that His nature and name is the All-gracious; for his compassions fail not.

Ver. 23. Every day sees some renewal of them; there is "daily help for daily needs," as great is thy faithfulness. God is faithful to all that He has promised in creation and grace.

Ver. 24. This perception that the Lord is gracious, pitying, and trustworthy, leads on, not merely to verbal profession of the knowledge of God, but to an acceptance of Himself as the dear and only treasure of the heart. My portion is Jehovah. None in heaven for Him; none on earth desired with Him.

(c) Ver. 25. Such an acceptance suggests more knowledge. Good is Jehovah to them that wait for him, to a soul that seeks him. He is ready to respond to those who feel need of Him and foster longings after Himself.

Ver. 26. So when the graciousness of the Lord is perceived, and its proffers yielded to, blessedness is not far off. Good it is both to wait and be silent for the salvation of Jehovah. There is to be no striving, nor crying, nor causing the voice to be heard in the street. Confidence in His power to save hushes fears and doubts, and enables us calmly to meet the events of life. *He will in no wise leave or forsake those who wait for Him.*

Ver. 27. Good is it for a man to bear a yoke, that is, anything by which he will be trained for his Owner, and to do his Owner's work. Teaching may do so; affliction may do so. Both the one and the other show to a man what he is—ignorant, weak, with more that is bad than he had believed he had. God speaks in both methods as issues of His love, and to obtain *vessels unto honour, sanctified, meet for the Master's use.* The phrase in his youth does not mean that the poet was still a young man. He might be an aged man, looking back on the experiences of his life, and conscious of the value of the discipline he had been subjected to when the dew of youth was upon him. He is blessed who, in earlier years, has been drawn or driven to look into the face of realities, and to learn something of the *afflictions of Christ* before he has been in grip with temptations from the clamant *lusts of the flesh and of the mind.*

(1) Ver. 28. A yoke is not of itself beneficial; it must be borne along with desires and efforts to reach to its purpose. "Since it is good for man that he should learn to endure suffering, let him sit still and bear it patiently; . . . let him sit solitary, as becomes those in sorrow, and be silent without murmuring when God puts such a burden on him."—*Keil.* The fogs of the world, if a man enters into them, may veil the waymarks of God.

Ver. 29. *Let him put his mouth in the dust*—significant of being humbled *under the mighty hand of God*—indulging in no whimpers, framing no self-excuses, making no boasts, only waiting to *hear what God the Lord will speak*, and by no means despairing of help for every time of need. *It may be there is hope.*

Ver. 30. *Let him give his cheek to him that smiteth him*, as was similarly enforced in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 39), and involving the wider application, *when reviled not to revile again.* Exemplified by Job, by the prophetic Servant of Jehovah, by the greatest of all Sufferers. The gradation is perceptible. "The sitting alone and in silence is comparatively the easiest. It is harder to place the mouth in the dust and yet cling to hope; it is most difficult of all to give the cheek to the smiter, and to satiate oneself with dishonour" (*Naegel.*), be filled full with reproaches.

(2) Ver. 31. For this silent waiting on the Lord, amid humiliations and scorn, there is all-sufficient strength. It is in the Lord Himself, in the belief that He is at work; that, whatever our tribulations are, however bitter ingredients we must drain out of our cup, whatever the moral conflicts and self-condemnations we must pass through, He will not put us away. *The Lord will not cast off for ever*; there will be an end of tears and isolation on account of the absent Friend.

Ver. 32. His providences may distress us. Physical pains, social straits, national demoralisation, and inward unrest, blame, forebodings, may overwhelm us. These are goads by which He is thrusting us from a wrong way into a right, but "it is love that bruises us." Yet he will have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.

Ver. 33. He would rather not produce suffering. His heart is not in doing so. He has a distinct end in view to be reached through tribulation. For he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men. Child and adult, Israelite and heathen, will meet trouble, but not one is outside the sympathy of God. We can supplement this from a later teacher, who tells us that our Father *chastises for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*

(3) Vers. 34-36. The Lord does not afflict willingly, yet He is not indifferent to the injustice of man to man. All the details of human procedure are regarded by Him, and he would have men to know that He is *on the throne judging right*, that they may trust Him entirely, and that there is no evil needing to be grieved over but sin. Such is the intimation in this triad of verses, the three parts of which depend on the last clause: *To trample under his feet*—the feet of the oppressor—all prisoners of the earth; an allusion to the cruelties of the Chaldeans. Jews in exile, Jews in prisons, yes, and outraged captives everywhere, are referred to. *He hears the sighing of the prisoner.* *To turn aside the right of a man*, that which is grounded in the far-reaching nature of things formed by the Righteous One, *before the face of the Most High.* This phrase is illustrated by the wilderness legislation as to matters of trespass, *The cause of both parties shall come before [God] Elohim, he whom Elohim shall condemn,* &c. (Exod. xxii. 9). The phraseology obviously designates judges as acting in place of the *Judge of all the earth*, and is found used in later times (Ps. lxxxii. 6). *To subvert a man in his cause*, to act unfairly towards another in the ordinary pursuits of life, *the Lord approveth not.* Questioning this translation, Keil renders, *Doth not the Lord look [to such doings as these]?*

(4) Ver. 37. The reason for not mentioning any name of God, as in vers. 1-17, is now wholly dispensed with, and He is presented as conditioning all events. He observes man's dealings with his neighbours. He provides that *every transgression and disobedience receive a just recompense* of reward. No injustice is permissible. If a man or nation could devise and carry out their own commands, then evil or good would come in spite of God. But who is he

that saith and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded [it]? His will is supreme. So it follows:—

Ver. 38. From the mouth of the Most High does not the evil and the good come? It is a term of the age-lasting problem. He lets evil be done and punishes the evil-doer. He must work out His will, for He works within us to will and do that which is good. In both good and evil we are in close contiguity with God.

Ver. 39. The right interpretation partly depends on whether or not we read this verse as one question. Both the Authorised Version and the Revised Version take the former course. The Hebrew renders this doubtful. It would warrant a division. For what should a living man, one in life's school, and with all the possibilities of the education he is receiving from the Lord, complain? Let every one come to a more manly position, and they would see it needful to sigh over their sins. Sin brings on men the evils really to be lamented, and the space given should be filled up with repentance.

(2) Ver. 40. The remnant, who were referred to in ver. 22, carry out here the suggestion just made, that sighing, not over sufferings but over sins, is the becoming utterance for every one. The sorrows and pains endured were resultants from the sins of all the people, and thus a joint resolve and confession is made. Only as men see that they have strayed like lost sheep will they truly say, Let us search and try our ways, yet not delay in that effort, however genuine it may be, but let us return unto Jehovah, the whole way back, with no halt half-way, with no reserves for self.

Ver. 41. Such a return merges into soul-moving prayer—prayer that is not only “the motion of a hidden fire trembling in the breast” or “the upward glancing of an eye,” but also manifests itself by some outwardness. The emotion is the chief element in any suitable external gesture. Let us lift up our hearts with our hands unto God in the heavens, satisfied that our help is not sent from any earthly sanctuary, but from within the veil.

Ver. 42. A vision of God throws a white light upon the dark records of past life. In that light men are forced to pass God's judgment on themselves. *I have brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.* God's rule and man's treason are confronted, and man is condemned to suffer. As for us, We have transgressed and rebelled; as for Thee, Thou hast not pardoned; a phrase which intimates that He would scourge into the way of righteousness, if no other method avails, and that Israel was then under His chastising rod. He is ready to pardon, and the withholding pardon is not His desire, but a “natural sequence” of baffled instructions and warnings—of a deadened spiritual faculty which turns His grace into a penalty.

(D) Ver. 43. Thou hast covered with anger, whether Himself or us is not clear, but as the next clause, and pursued us, mentions the latter, it may be preferable to regard the people as wrapped round with a garment woven in the loom of wrath, and which marked them out as the objects to be chased for punishment.

Ver. 44. There had been cries for relief (ver. 41), but unavailing, for Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud; clouds and darkness are round about Him when He displays His royal righteousness and judgment in burning up His adversaries (Ps. xcvi. 2, 3). That cloud is a barrier [preventing] prayer from passing through to His mercy-seat.

Ver. 45. Troubles are accumulated upon the nation. Rejected prayers signify condemnation of their religiousness. It is not the act, but the motive and purpose which determine the relation of the worshipper to the Worshipped. Ritual may be punctiliously carried out, and hide God instead of helping to reveal Him. When He hides His face, they are troubled, and, as if He would exhibit a striking illustration before the world of what will result from disobedience to His will, Thou hast made us the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the peoples. Treated as worthless, like Paul and his brethren in Christ (1 Cor. iv. 13), but these were more than conquerors through Him who loved them.

(E) Vers. 46-48 present significant intimations of their base condition. Enemies making sport of them, fear and pitfalls surrounding them, and the oft-recurring feeling of utter destruction instigating tears shed as copiously as rivers of water.

(V) Ver. 49. The excessive weeping is continuous. Mine eye poureth down tears, and that without interruption. Nor will the sound of weeping be stanchd, except when his undercurrent of hope reaches its terminus.

Ver. 50. Till Jehovah looks down and beholds from heaven. When He sees the bearing and result of afflictions on His Name's glory, then He hears the sighing of the prisoner. For He will not contend for ever, neither will He be always wroth.

Ver. 51. Beyond that the eye shows externally it exerts influence upon the inward part. Mine eye hurts my soul: not in the rather jejune sense that the flood of tears had made the eye painful, and that pain was felt in the soul; but the soul was pained because of the eye beholding the sad lot of the more delicate and defenceless part of the population, the daughters of my city.

(S) Ver. 52. They have hunted me down like a bird is hunted when pursued with the eagerness of those who are my enemies without cause, and who will not relax efforts till they catch the quarry.

Ver. 53. He was haled to prison by them. They have cut off my life in the pit. Shut in

from all activities and society, he was as a man dead, as in a tomb over which they have cast a stone on me. Taking such illustrations to be chiefly figurative, yet here the first clause is a probable allusion to the treatment of Jeremiah (chap. xxxviii. 6), and the second may refer to an unmentioned incident of the same time, for which corroboration may be found in the case of Daniel (chap. vi. 17.)

Ver. 54. The peril was aggravated by waters that flowed over my head; the plural perhaps indicating the influx of a spring and the condensation of vapour in the closeness of a pit. In a state so desperate to the eyes of flesh, I said, I am cut off as a man that has no help (Ps. lxxxviii. 4), as He was who became sin for us (Isa. liii. 8).

The remaining verses of the chapter take the form of prayer, as at the close of Chapters I. and II. In it there are thanksgivings for relief (vers. 55-58), an appeal because of the evil which enemies had done and were doing (vers. 59-63), and a call for recompense therefor (vers. 64-66).

(P) Ver. 55. I called upon thy name, O Jehovah, asking with some true idea of what the words and works of the God of Israel revealed concerning Himself, suggestive, too, of the manner in which the Lord Jesus would have His friends to pray—*Ask the Father in My name*—out of the depths of the pit into which he had been thrown.

Ver. 56. A more true position is secured than that which was held previously (vers. 8 and 44). My voice thou heardest at that time when I besought thee with my spirit and voice, Hide not—close not—thine ear at my breathing—my sighing for relief—at my cry. It is questionable if the rendering, *Hide not thine ear for my cry for relief*, is not rather an explanation than a fair version.

Ver. 57. Thou drewest near in the day I called upon thee. Only spiritual apprehension of God as He who is behind all events and *plenteous in mercy* can bring a conviction of accepted prayer. The heart is then in a state to hear His comforting words, Thou saidst, Fear not.

(7) Ver. 58. There were rights to be maintained, wrongs to be redressed, and in both help was received from a present God. Thou, O Jehovah, hast pleaded—contended for—the causes of my soul. One thing had hurt his soul (ver. 51), but others also saddened and weakened thought and effort, and the Lord had counteracted them. He had also interfered when hope of living was cut off, Thou hast redeemed my life by Thy power over all.

Ver. 59. Trials are not things of the past only. Under their continuous pressure endurance is sought for in the truth that the eye and ear of the Lord are ever open for all sights and sounds. Thou, O Jehovah, hast seen my wrong, that which is done to me, and that sight forms a plea for the righteous sentence of Him who *sitteth on the throne judging right*.

Ver. 60. There was the keenest of vengeance in the treatment to which the Lord's servant was subjected, and there were devices against me; but it was a certain fact that the All-seeing One had observed every secret or open scheme.

(C) Ver. 61. The revengeful, bad feeling expressed itself in reviling words. Thou hast heard their reproach, O Jehovah, and all the evil machinations they framed against me.

Ver. 62 is a variant expression of the idea of the former verse, *Thou hast heard the words of the lips of those that rose up against me, and their meditation, which occupied their minds all the day*.

Ver. 63. Their downsitting and their uprising behold thou, all their proceedings when at rest, and when they get up to do what they resolve. In hilarious and scornful mood they taunt and deride me; I am their song. It was not a momentary outburst of passion, not one hour's lapse into jocoseness, but the tenor of the life which was manifested.

(N) Ver. 64. The evil life cannot pass without condemnation. Thou wilt render a recompense to them, O Jehovah. A man may pray that revilings and machinations may be thwarted, not from a desire for personal revenge, but from the knowledge that *striving with the Maker* incurs guilt and fixes the destiny of the striver according to the work of their hands, reaping what they sow (2 Tim. iv. 14).

Ver. 65. Thou wilt give them blindness [Heb. a covering] of heart, that which is turned into a veil (2 Cor. iii. 14) by their not becoming sons of the light, by their walking in darkness into the ditch. Thy curse to them. *Cursed be the man who maketh flesh his arm*.

Ver. 66. *Evil shall slay the wicked*. Thou wilt pursue them in anger and destroy them, so that the wicked may be no more in Thy dominion under the heavens of Jehovah. *So let thine enemies perish, O Jehovah, and thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth*.

HOMILETICS.

THE MAN OF AFFLICTION.

(Verses 1-3.)

It is given to some men to catch and idealise the poetic instinct of a nation, to gather to a focus the ideas that have been dimly floating in the national mind,

and, in words of burning passion, to express what all have been vaguely feeling, but none have been able hitherto to clothe in fitting speech. Another class of men represent the chivalric and military characteristics of a nation; another the judicial and ruling types. Jeremiah, distinguished as poet, prophet, and patriot, acquired immortal distinction in the annals of the Hebrew nation as the Man of Sorrow. In him the unparalleled sufferings of Judea seemed concentrated and individualised. His mournful dirge, sung in the minor key, gave voice, with lavish variety of imagery and felicity of phrase, to the overwhelming anguish of a distracted and ruined people. In this sublime elegy the poet-prophet touches the deepest woe of the sufferer in all ages, and provides it with adequate expression. Ewald justly remarks: "Very probably the prophet draws much of what he says from his own experience, but the whole that he sets forth is more than his own personality; it is the type and pattern of every individual. And here, therefore, is the summit and turning-point of the whole Book of Lamentations." When the soul finds words in which to breathe out its sorrow, the oppression is already relieved. The hope of deliverance begins to dawn. Observe in this paragraph—

I. That the man of affliction regards his sufferings as the result of the Divine anger. "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath" (ver. 1). It is the rod of His anger to chastise and correct, not the sword to utterly destroy. Even in the manifestation of His wrath God seeks to restore the sinner. The last stroke of His anger must be painful, alarming, crushing; the more so that it is felt to be so just. Behind the dark frown of the Almighty the light of mercy shines. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." The most hopeful feature of affliction is the moment when the sufferer recognises the hand of God in it; when he acknowledges it as the fruit of personal sin. Then it is that wrath gives place to mercy: punishment is disarmed by pardon. Sin is antagonism to God, and merits nothing but wrath. A genuine repentance is the open door of escape.

II. That the man of affliction is plunged into bewildering gloom. "He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light" (ver. 2). The darkness of suffering had a realistic meaning for Jeremiah, as he remembered the miseries of his incarceration in the dungeon (Jer. xxxvii. 15, 16; xxxviii. 6, 10-13). But the language is a metaphorical description of afflictions in general, and is frequently employed in Scripture. In the most graphic and explicit terms the prophet foretold the experience he here describes (Jer. xiii. 15, 16). Suffering is a dark enigma that baffles the wisest to solve. It is an aggravation of suffering when it has to be endured in darkness. We have heard of a strong man who had braved all kinds of dangers by land and sea, who was absolutely afraid of being alone in the dark: he had no fear of anything he could see, but was in mortal dread of the unseen. Darkness overawes the most volatile. A party of courtiers of Louis XV. were once gathered round Cassini to witness an eclipse from the terrace of the Paris observatory, and were laughing at the populace, whose cries were heard as the light began to fade, when, as the unnatural gloom came quickly on, silence fell on them too, the panic-terror striking through their laughter. There is nothing so distressing, so oppressive, so bewildering, so hopeless to contend with, as darkness.

III. That the man of affliction is smitten with repeated strokes of the Divine Hand. "Surely against me is He turned; He turneth His hand against me all the day" (ver. 3). It is not one stroke of affliction, but many, and these frequently repeated. Trouble never comes alone; it is often attended with a crowd of ills. Before we can recover from one calamity we are stricken with another. It may be difficult to find the kind heart behind the strong hand; but it is there. Not one blow more than is necessary will be permitted to fall. The most prolonged and reiterated suffering will cease as soon as its purpose is answered. While it continues there should be prayerful searchings of heart.

LESSONS.—1. *The fact of suffering testifies to the fact of sin.* 2. *Much of our suffering occasioned by witnessing the sufferings of others.* 3. *Suffering is a blessing when it brings us nearer to God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 1. **Ecce homo.** I. *Consider the generality of affliction in the nature thereof.* We met all generally in the first treason against ourselves in Adam's rebellion; and we met all, too, in the second treason—the treason against Jesus Christ. All our sins were upon His shoulders. All the evils and mischiefs of life come for the most part from this—that we think to enjoy those things which God hath given us only to use. III. *Consider affliction as bearing on man.* “I am the man that hath seen affliction.” It was that man that is denoted and signified in that name that hath lain under affliction, and therefore no kind of man was likely to escape. Man carries the spawn and seed and eggs of affliction in his own flesh, and his own thoughts make haste to hatch them and bring them up. We make all our worms snakes, all our snakes vipers, all our vipers dragons by our murmuring. III. *Consider affliction in its special application to one man.* That man the prophet Jeremiah, one of the best of men. As he was submitted to these extraordinary afflictions, we see that no man is so necessary to God as that God cannot come to His ends without that man. God can lack and leave out any man in His service. The best of our wages is adversity, because that gives us a true fast, and a right value of our prosperity. Jeremy had it; the best of his rank must. No man is excused of subsequent afflictions by precedent, nor of falling into more by having borne some already. Our afflictions are as beggars; they tell others, and send more after them. When the hand of God was upon Jeremiah he declared God's handwriting; not only to his own conscience by acknowledging that all these afflictions were for his own sins, but by acknowledging to the world that God had laid such and such afflictions upon him. St. Ambrose, in a journey from Milan to Rome, passed some time

one evening with his host, who bragged he had never had any cross in his life. Ambrose at once removed to another house, protesting that either the man was very unthankful to God that would not take knowledge of His corrections, or that God's measure was by this time full, and would surely, soundly, and suddenly pour down all together. IV. *Consider the weight and vehemence of afflictions.* 1. They are aggravated in that they are the Lord's. They are inevitable; they cannot be avoided; they are just, and cannot be pleaded against; nor can we ease ourselves with any imagination of our innocency, as though they were undeserved. 2. They are in His rod. Our murmuring makes a rod a staff, and a staff a sword, and that which God presented for physic, poison. 3. They are inflicted by the rod of His wrath. Though there be properly no anger in God, yet God is said to do a thing in anger when He does it so as an angry man would do it. It is the highest extent of affliction that we take God to be angrier than He is. V. *Consider the comforts we have in afflictions.* “I am the man that hath seen affliction.” 1. That we see our afflictions, we understand, consider them. We see that affliction comes from God, and that it is sent that we may see and taste the goodness of God. 2. That, though afflicted, we still retain our manhood. God may mend thee in marring thee; He may build thee up in dejecting thee; He may infuse another manhood into thee, so that thou canst say, “I am that Christian man; I am the man that cannot despair since Christ is the remedy.” 3. That the rod of God's wrath is also the rod of His comfort and strength (Micah vii. 14; Ps. xlv. 6; Ps. xxiii. 4).—*Donne.*

— **God and human suffering:** 1. Often brought into strange relationship. 2. Suffering is a significant revelation of how God views human sin. 3. Suf-

fering may draw man nearer to, or drive him farther from, God.

Vers. 2, 3. **The mystery of suffering.** I. *Impossible to solve by human speculations.* "Into darkness, but not into light." II. *Increased by the difficulty of accounting for the part God takes in it.* "He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light" (ver. 2). III. *Intensified by the apparent persistency of the Divine severity.* "Surely against me is He turned; He turneth His hand against me all the day" (ver. 3).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—God's anger man's heaviest affliction. God's anger exerts itself by embittering afflictions. Every affliction is of itself a grievance, and a breach made upon our happiness; but there is sometimes a secret energy that so edges and quickens its afflictive operation that a blow levelled at the body shall enter into the very soul. What is the reason that David is sometimes so courageous that "though he walks through the valley of the shadow of death, he fears no evil;" and, at another time, God no sooner "hides His face, but he is troubled"? What is the cause that a man sometimes breaks through a greater calamity, and at another time the same person fails and desponds under a loss of the same nature? Whence can this be, but that God infuses some more grains of His wrath into the one than into the other?—*South.*

— **The Divine anger.** Anger is the whetstone of strength; in an equality of other terms, it will make a man prevail. Nothing is able to stand before a fire which is once enraged; so is it when the fire of the Lord's revenge breaks forth upon the enemies of His Son. Add hereunto our disposition and preparedness for the wrath of God. Far easier is it to make a print in wax than in an adamant; to kindle a fire in dry stubble than in green wood. Wicked men have fitted themselves for wrath, and are procurers and artificers of their own destruction.—*Bishop Reynolds.*

Darkness and danger. Sailing once along a coast where a friend had suffered shipwreck, the scene which recalled his

danger filled us with no fear; because, while his ship, on the night she ran ashore, was cutting her way through the densest fog, we were ploughing the waters of a silver sea, where noble headlands, pillared cliffs, scattered islands, and surf-beaten reefs stood bathed in the brightest moonshine. There was no danger just because there was no darkness.—*Guthrie.*

Darkness precedes light. The Lord oftentimes makes everything as dark as it can become, just that presently the light may shine more brilliantly. Ishmael faints before Hagar finds the well. Joseph is left in prison and oblivion before being raised to dignity. The Assyrian host surrounds Jerusalem ere they are smitten by the angel. Jeremiah sinks into the pit before he is placed on a rock. Violent persecution of the Christians preceded the triumph of the Gospel. Mediæval darkness preceded the dawn of the Reformation.—*Oosterzee.*

Affliction ripens character. There is a certain mellowness which affliction sheds upon the character, a softening that it effects of all the rougher and more repulsive asperities of our nature, a delicacy of temperament into which it often melts and refines the most ungainly spirit. It is not the pride of aspiring talent that we carry to heaven with us; it is not the lustre of a superiority which dazzles and commands that we bear with us there. It is not the eminence of any public distinction or the fame of lofty and successful enterprise; and should these give undue confidence to man or throw an aspect of conscious and complacent energy over him, he wears not yet the complexion of Paradise; and should God select him as His own, He will send some special affliction that may chasten him out of all which is uncongenial with the place of blessedness, and at length reduce him to its unmingled love and its adoring humility. The character is purified by the simple process of passing through the fire. "And when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."—*Chalmers.*

Suffering a mystery. As the Egyptian who carried something wound up

in his napkin answered him who demanded what it was, that he covered it to the end that no man should see it; so likewise must we learn that if there be anything hidden and laid up in the works and dealings of God, it is of pur-

pose kept from us, to the end that we should not be too curious to inquire after it; that it is far better to be utterly ignorant herein than to have all the knowledge thereof that may be.—*Cawdray.*

HOMILETICS.

THE BEWILDERMENT OF GRIEF.

(Verses 4-9.)

I. Is accompanied with intense physical suffering. "My flesh and my skin hath He made old; He hath broken my bones" (ver. 4). The skin is wrinkled and worn, in this case not with age, but with excessive grief; and the suffering which in the preceding verses was represented as a slow wasting of strength, has now reached the stage of acute pain, such as is caused by the breaking of bones. It is a pitiable sight to see a nation or an individual growing prematurely old. This is not done by hard, honest, healthy work, but by sorrow and suffering. The strongest and most beautiful physical form rapidly shrinks and withers under the stroke of a great and overwhelming grief. A sudden calamity has been known to turn the hair grey in a single night, and to impose the wreck of years on the bewildered and moaning sufferer.

II. Is as of one immured in prison, from which all efforts to escape are futile (vers. 5, 7, 9). The prisoner is enclosed and fenced in with a solid wall as of hewn stone, but it is a wall of bitterness and weariness. There are paths, dark and tortuous, and as he gropes along them with the dim hope of finding an outlet, he finds himself in a maze which brings him back, after long and weary wandering, to the place whence he started. Like Byron's Prisoner of Chillon—

"It was liberty to stride
Along my cell from side to side,
And up and down, and then athwart,
And tread it over every part;
And round the pillars one by one,
Returning where my walk begun."

Grief fetters the soul as with a heavy chain. It may chafe and fret and tug to very weariness in the effort to obtain release; but in vain: the bondage remains. If we walk in the crooked paths of sin, we shall ultimately find ourselves enclosed within the crooked paths of sorrow, from which we shall be powerless to escape.

III. Is as of one buried in a dismal sepulchre. "He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old" (ver. 6). Grief has worn down the sufferer to the semblance of a skeleton, and he regards himself as a corpse laid in the dark chambers of the grave—dead, buried, and forgotten.

"For all was blank and bleak and gray,
It was not night, it was not day,
It was not even the dungeon-light,
So hateful to my heavy sight,
But vacancy absorbing space,
And fixedness without a place;
There were no stars, no earth, no time,
No check, no change, no good, no crime;
But silence and a stirless breath,
Which neither was of life nor death;
A sea of stagnant idleness,
Blind, boundless, mute, and motionless!"—*Byron.*

Excessive grief darkens and dulls every faculty, and robs life of all its charm. There are some sorrows from which death is a merciful release.

IV. **The loudest calls for help are disregarded.** "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer" (ver. 8). The walls of his prison are so thick that the loudest cries cannot pierce them; they are unheard and unheeded. It intensifies the bewilderment of grief when the most earnest cries for help bring no relief. A short time ago the dead body of a stalwart Scotch shepherd was found buried in the snow on the Ayrshire hills, within a short distance of his own home. Two days before, when walking homewards, he was overtaken with a snowstorm, and it is supposed must have been dazed by the fury of the tempest, and lost his way. It is distressing to think of his desperate struggles for life and his exhausting shouts for help, but all in vain. It is a painful phase in the mystery of suffering when God seems so indifferent to our prayers, and so slow to help. But even in this we are led by-and-bye to recognise the Divine justice and mercy.

LESSONS.—1. *The body sympathises with the sufferings of the soul.* 2. *Much of the suffering of life must be borne alone.* 3. *It is the bitterest ingredient in suffering when there is no prospect of relief.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 4-6. **The ravages of sorrow:**
I. *Destroy the freshness and bloom of youth.* "My flesh and my skin hath He made old." II. *Inflict acutest pain.* "He hath broken my bones" (ver. 4). III. *Oppress the soul with bitterness and toil.* "He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travel" (ver. 5). IV. *Overshadow the individual life with the gloom of the grave.* "He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old" (ver. 6).

Vers. 7-9. **A baffled sufferer:** I. *He is enclosed and fettered.* "He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out; He hath made my chain heavy" (ver. 7). II. *His cries for help are unavailing.* "Also when I cry and shout, He shutteth out my prayer" (ver. 8). III. *He is in a maze of tortuous paths, from which there is no outlet.* "He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, He hath made my paths crooked" (ver. 9).

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Causes of grief.** We fancy that all our afflictions are sent us directly from above; sometimes we think it in piety and contrition, but oftener in moroseness and discontent. It would be well, however, if we attempted to trace the causes of them; we should probably find their origin in some region of the heart which we never had well explored, or in which

we had secretly deposited our worst indulgences. The clouds that intercept the heavens from us come not from the heavens, but from the earth.—*Landor.*

A great sorrow. Henry I., on his return from Normandy, was accompanied by a crowd of nobles and his son William. The *White Ship*, in which the prince embarked, lingered behind the rest of the royal fleet, while the young nobles, excited with wine, hung over the ship's side taunting the priest who came to give the customary benediction. At last the guards of the king's treasure pressed the vessel's departure, and, driven by the arms of fifty rowers, it swept swiftly out to sea. All at once the ship's side struck on a rock at the mouth of the harbour, and in an instant it sank beneath the waves. One terrible cry, ringing through the stillness of the night, was heard by the royal fleet, but it was not till the morning that the fatal news reached the king. He fell unconscious to the ground, and rose *never to smile again!*

Secret grief. If the internal griefs of every man could be read, written on his forehead, how many who now excite envy would appear to be objects of pity!—*Metastasio.*

Grief irksome, but needful. A friend was asked concerning a beautiful horse feeding on the pasture with a clog on

its foot, "Why do you clog such a noble animal?" The reply was, "I would a great deal sooner clog him than lose him; he is given to leap hedges." That is why God clogs His people. He would rather clog them than lose them; for if He did not, they would leap and be gone.—*Spurgeon*.

The sufferer baffled by temptation.

A time of affliction is a time of temptation. Satan will not be wanting in any opportunity or advantage of setting upon the soul. When Pharaoh heard that the people were entangled in the wilderness, he pursued them; and when Satan sees a soul entangled with its distresses and troubles, he thinks it his time and hour to assault it. He seeks to winnow, and comes when the corn is under the flail. Reckon, therefore, that, when trouble cometh, the prince of this world cometh also. Then is the time to take the shield of faith, that we may be able to quench his fiery darts. If they be neglected, they will inflame the soul.—*John Owen*.

Grief, its uses. What! would you choose that you alone may fare better than all God's saints? that God should strew carpets for your nice feet only, to walk into your heaven, and make that way smooth for you which all patriarchs,

prophets, evangelists, confessors, Christ Himself, have found rugged and bloody! Away with this self-love, and come down, you ambitious sons of Zebedee, and, ere you think of sitting near the throne, be content to be called unto the cross. Now is your trial. Let your Saviour see how much of His bitter portion you can pledge. Then shall you see how much of His glory He can afford you. Be content to drink of His vinegar and gall, and you shall drink new wine with Him in His kingdom.—*Bishop Hall*.

—As snow is of itself cold, yet warms and refreshes the earth, so afflictions, though in themselves grievous, yet keep the soul of the Christian warm and make it fruitful. Let the most afflicted know and remember that it is better to be preserved in brine than to rot in honey.—*Salter*.

—After a forest fire has raged furiously, it has been found that many pine cones have had their seeds released by the heat, which ordinarily would have remained unsown. The future forest sprang from the ashes of the former. Some Christian graces, such as humility, patience, sympathy, have been evolved from the sufferings of the saints. The furnace has been used to fructify.

HOMILETICS.

JEHOVAH AS A FOE.

(Verses 10–13.)

I. Is aware of every effort to escape out of His power. "He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places" (ver. 10). The afflicted one compares himself to a fugitive striving to escape from his miseries, but baffled at every turn. Finding his way blocked up by a solid wall, he plunges into the uncertain paths of the forest, only to find himself exposed to the rapacity of beasts of prey. In every direction he is menaced with enemies; to turn back is as dangerous as to press forward. Exhausted and bewildered, he is ready to sink with terror and despair. Woe to the man who has made an enemy of Jehovah! His most frantic efforts to escape are in vain. He is everywhere threatened by the law he has violated, and its penalties lie about his path like wild beasts, ready to seize him as their victim.

II. Alarms by the suddenness and violence of His attack. "He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces. He hath made me desolate" (ver. 11). The figure of the lion is still maintained. Aware of its presence, the startled fugitive turns aside, only to find himself suddenly pounced upon and torn in pieces, so that, stupified with terror and pain, he is powerless to flee. "He

hath made me *desolate*," a favourite word with Jeremiah, occurring more than forty times in his Prophecy, and five times in Lamentations (ch. i. 4, 13, 16; iv. 5; v. 18). The root meaning of the word is appalled, astonished, stupified, struck dumb with terror. The impenitent wicked are every moment in imminent peril. The doom of destruction is already declared against the workers of iniquity, and that destruction shall come "unawares, as a whirlwind, suddenly and swiftly" (*cf.* Ps. xxxv. 8; Prov. i. 27, x. 29, xxi. 15; 1 Thess. v. 3; 2 Pet. ii. 1). Christ is the refuge of the sinner, immediately accessible, and in Him there is invulnerable security.

III. Is an unerring marksman. "He hath bent His bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow" (ver. 12). The simile of the lion naturally suggests that of the hunter. When the smitten fugitive is under the paw of the lion, the hunter comes, but not to deliver him. It is not the beast of prey, but the poor mangled victim which is the mark for his arrows. The Mohammedan Caliph Aaly was once asked, "If the heavens were a bow and the earth the cord thereof, if calamities were arrows, man the butt for those arrows, and the holy blessed God the unerring marksman, where could the sons of Adam flee for succour?" The Caliph replied, "The children of Adam must flee unto the Lord." This was the state of unhappy Judah; this is the state of the man who wickedly defies God. There is no escape but by a penitent return to Him whose bow is already bent to punish, and whose arrow reaches its mark with unerring precision.

IV. Can inflict acutest pain. "He hath caused the arrows of His quiver to enter into my reins"—*my heart* (ver. 13). God has many arrows; they are swift in their passage, unerring in their aim, and pierce deep. None can wound as God can. In the region where the greatest sin against Him has been committed—in the heart—there the arrows of His judgment penetrate and produce the keenest anguish. "These immediate blows of God upon the soul seem to be those things called in Psalm xxxviii. 2 God's arrows; they are strange, sudden, invincible amazements upon the spirit, leaving such a damp upon it as defies the faint and weak cordials of all creature enjoyments. The wounds which God Himself makes none but God Himself can cure."

LESSONS.—1. *It is vain for the sinner to defy Jehovah.* 2. *Sin cannot evade either detection or punishment.* 3. *The only hope of the sinner is to penitently implore the mercy of Jehovah.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 10, 11. The dangers of a sinful life. I. *The agents of punishment are always at hand.* "He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places" (ver. 10). II. *There is no escape from punishment for sin.* "He hath turned aside my ways and pulled me in pieces" (ver. 11). III. *The punishment for sin is sudden and appalling.* "He hath made me desolate" (ver. 11).

Vers. 12, 13. The certainty of punishment. I. *Because God is just.* II. *Because God is unerring in His treatment of sin.* "He hath bent His bow and set me as a mark for the arrow" (ver. 12). III. *The punishment will be painfully realised.* "He hath caused the

arrows of His quiver to enter into my reins" (ver. 13).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Jehovah a foe to all sin. God Himself, we have always understood, hates sin with a most authentic, celestial, and eternal hatred—a hatred, a hostility inexorable, unappeasable, which blasts the scoundrel, and all scoundrels ultimately, into black annihilation and disappearance from the sum of things. The path of it is the path of a flaming sword. He that has eyes may see it walking, inexorable, divinely beautiful and divinely terrible, through the chaotic gulf of human history, and everywhere burning, as with unquenchable fire, the false and the

deadworthy from the true and life-worthy, making all human history and the biography of every man a God's cosmos in place of a devil's chaos. So it is in the end; even so to every man who is a man, and not a mutinous beast, and has eyes to see.—*Carlyle*.

The dangers of sin. The favourite sport of Canada in winter is tobogganing. Some of the slides are very steep and look very dangerous, and the sensation of rushing down the hill on the thin strips of basswood is one never to be forgotten. "How do you like it?" asked a Canadian girl of an American visitor, whom she had steered down the steepest slide. "Oh, I would not have missed it for a hundred dollars!" "You'll try it again, won't you?" "Not for a thousand dollars!"

—Mr. Ruskin speaks in his "Love's Meinie" of the little crake, a bird which lays her eggs on an inartificially constructed platform of decayed leaves or stalks of marsh plants, slightly elevated above the water. "How elevated I cannot find proper account; that is to say, whether it is hung to the stems of growing reeds or built on hillocks of soil; but the bird is always liable to have its nest overflowed by floods."

The degradation of sin. When the followers of Ulysses degraded themselves by the misuse of pleasures until they fell to the level of the brutes, it is said that Circe, touching them with her wand, turned them into swine. She

brought to the surface the inner ugliness, revealed the animal that ruled within.

The bitterness of sin. There is more bitterness following upon sin's ending than ever there was sweetness flowing from sin's acting. You that see nothing but *well* in its commission will suffer nothing but *woe* in its conclusion. You that sin for your profits will never profit by your sins.—*Dyer*.

Divine judgment a painful reality. That which comes immediately from God has most of God in it. As the sun when he darts his beams in a direct perpendicular line does it most forcibly because most immediately, there are terrors upon the mind which flow immediately from God, and are not weakened or refracted by passing through the instrumental conveyance of a second cause, for that which passes through a thing is contracted according to the narrowness of its passage. The terrors here spoken of, not being inflicted by the intermediate help of anything, but being darted forth from God Himself, are by this incomparably more strong and piercing. When God wounds a man by the loss of an estate, of his health, of a relation, the smart is but commensurate to the thing which is lost, poor and finite. But when He Himself employs His whole omnipotence, and is Himself both the archer and the arrow, there is as much difference between this and the former as when a house lets fall a cobweb and when it falls itself upon a man.—*South*.

HOMILETICS.

COMPLEX PHASES OF DISTRESS.

(Verses 14-17.)

I. The sufferer is the subject of ridicule. "I was a derision to all my people, and their song all the day" (ver. 14). Dropping the use of metaphor for the nonce, the prophet plainly indicates in these words what the arrows were that pierced him to the quick. They were the darts of ridicule, sharpened with envy and poisoned with rancour—a ridicule all the keener as coming from his own people, and revealing the base treachery that had been all along cherished under the mask of professed friendship. It is a deep wound to a sensitive heart to discover the fickleness of perverse human nature. The very people who smile upon and flatter us in our prosperity are the first to curl the lip of scorn and to join those who make sport over our misfortunes. The idol of the crowd to-day

may be the execration of the crowd to-morrow. It is a part of the suffering of the unfaithful to have to endure the contempt of God and man, and the sting of the distress is the consciousness that it is self-induced and richly deserved. Where shall he look for sympathy and help? Not from man. His only refuge is in God.

II. The sufferer is satiated with pain and sunk in abject humiliation. "He hath filled me with bitterness, He hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, He hath covered me with ashes" (vers. 15, 16). He is as one glutted with bitter food and stupefied with nauseous drinks. An Arabic poet describes a man grievously afflicted as "a pounder of wormwood." His food is so mingled with the grit of the ashes in which it is baked that his teeth are broken in eating it, and he is himself smothered with the ashes into the midst of which he has been thrown down. To the Oriental mind this is a graphic description of acute suffering and shame. Vanity, pride, and disobedience end in humiliation and trouble. "It seems appointed," says Lange, "that much of the highest instruction should come to us, even in the Bible, through the sufferings and struggles of individual men." The anguish of the prophet was a type of the sufferings of a rebellious nation.

III. The sufferer is robbed of happiness. "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace" (ver. 17). Peace in Hebrew has the wider signification of welfare, happiness. Hence it was their salutation in life, "Peace be to thee," and in death was engraved upon their sepulchres, "In peace." Peace with God is the source of permanent and overflowing happiness, and its possession is conditioned on the obedience of faith, for "being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." How great is the loss when our peace is gone and our happiness takes wing! It is the loss of that we most highly prize and diligently seek after, for happiness is the object of universal search. Rob a man of his peace, and what is there left to live for? The soul, unloosed from her old moorings, is tossed about like a helpless ship in the troubled sea which cannot rest. Life is an intolerable burden, and, swung in a whirl of black despair, the soul cries out with the distracted patriarch, "Oh, that I might have my request," &c. (Job vi. 8-10).

IV. The sufferer loses the very idea of good. "I forgot prosperity" (ver. 17). I forgot what good is, lost the very idea of what it means. There is no enjoyment in the present; there is no hope in the future. It is impossible to conceive a more pitiable and forlorn condition. The prophet has surely reached the bottom of his despair; there is no lower depth. This is the fate of the man who tries to live without God. His views of right and wrong, of liberty and bondage, of prosperity and adversity, are utterly confounded. It is a dangerous experiment for any man to try. Christ is the Hope of humanity. To be without Him is to be without God, and to be in the condition of the Ephesians of a former age, "Having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. ii. 12).

LESSONS.—1. *It is a painful experience to meet with scorn where we expected sympathy.* 2. *There is always something to modify the happiness of life.* 3. *It is one of the saddest results of suffering when the soul loses faith in goodness.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 14, 15. **Ridicule:** I. Is hard to bear when coming from our enemies. II. Has a special aggravation when it is exultingly employed against us by those we had loved and trusted. III. Overwhelms its victim by its bitterness and ceaseless outflow.

Ver. 17. **The loss of happiness:** I. Is the loss of peace. II. Is the loss of true notions of goodness. III. Is the fate of the obstinately unbelieving.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Triumph over ridicule.** A pious poor man was much

ridiculed on account of his religion. Being asked if these daily persecutions did not make him ready to give up his profession, he replied, "No! Our minister once said in his sermon that if we were so foolish as to permit such people to laugh us out of religion till at last we dropped into hell, they could not laugh us out again."

— What would the nightingale care if the toad despised her singing? She would still sing on, and leave the cold toad to his dank shadows. And what care I for the sneers of men who grovel upon earth? I will still sing on in the ear and bosom of God.—*Beecher*.

Treachery has no pity. Sir Anthony Kingston, the provost-marshal of the Protector, the Earl of Hertford, sent word to the mayor of Bodmin that he would dine with him. He had a man to hang too, he said, and a stout gallows must be ready. The dinner was duly eaten and the gallows prepared. "Think you," said Kingston as they stood looking at it, "think you is it strong enough?" "Yea, sir," quoth the mayor, "it is." "Well, then," said Sir Anthony, "get up; it is for you." The mayor, greatly abashed, exclaimed and protested. "Sir," said Kingston, "there is no remedy; ye have been a busy rebel, and this is appointed for your reward;" and so, without respite or stay, the mayor was hanged.

Suffering and its compensations. Should the Empress determine to banish me, let her banish me; "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." If she will cast me into the sea, let her cast me into the sea; I will remember Jonah. If she will throw me into a

burning fiery furnace, the three children were there before me. If she will throw me to the wild beasts, I will remember that Daniel was in the den of lions. If she will condemn me to be stoned, I shall be an associate of Stephen, the proto-martyr. If she will have me beheaded, the Baptist has submitted to the same punishment. If she will take away my substance, "naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to it."—*Chrysostom*.

The best work comes out of distress. The people of Verona, when they saw Dante in the streets, used to say, "See, there is the man that was in hell!" Ah yes! he had been in hell—in hell enough, in long severe sorrow and struggle, as the like of him is pretty sure to have been. *Commedias* that come out *divine* are not accomplished otherwise. Thought, true labour of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of pain? Born as out of the black whirlwind; true *effort*, in fact, as of a captive struggling to free himself: that is *thought*. In all ways we are to become perfect through suffering.—*Carlyle*.

Happiness depends on God. Solon said, "No man ought to be called happy till he dies, because he knows not what his life is to be." But the Christian may always call himself happy here because wherever his tent is carried, he need never pitch it where the cloud does not move and where he is not surrounded by a wall of fire. "I will be a wall of fire round about them, and their glory in the midst." They cannot dwell where God is not householder, warder, and bulwark of salvation.

HOMILETICS.

THE DAWN OF HOPE.

(Verses 18-21.)

I. Begins to appear when the soul has reached the verge of despair. "I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord" (ver. 18). When things get to the worst they begin to mend. For some time the affairs of the prophet had been sinking into ever-deepening gloom. His peace and happiness had departed, the memory that they ever existed had perished, and now dark doubts about the Divine goodness had finished the degenerating process. It was a critical moment.

The soul oscillated between utter collapse and the beginning of recovery. It is a mercy the soul is not left to itself in its weakest moments. Help was at hand, and hope began to dawn. All the time the soul was expressing the utmost despondency, it was struggling against despair, and feeling for some ground of confidence and hope. It begins to appear that, after all, trouble is God's method of making known His righteousness and love. A way out of the dungeon is opening.

II. Indicated by the prayer of the soul for the Divine pity. "Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall" (ver. 19). *Remember.* It is a prayer to Jehovah, beseeching compassion for the soul that has supped its fill of misery, which it has found as bitter as wormwood and gall. There is hope for man, for the worst of men, when he begins to pray. It is the first step upward in the pathway of deliverance. It may seem a cry of despair, but it is a cry that appeals to the Divine pity, and not in vain. The powers of Omnipotence are put into operation for the soul's rescue.

III. Evident by the fact of the soul's voluntary humiliation. "My soul hath them still in remembrance and is humbled in me" (ver. 20). It is borne in upon the sufferer that his extraordinary afflictions are the consequences of sin. The mind oppressed and crippled by a morbid contemplation of its miseries is now transferred to a consideration of their cause, and reflection upon its transgressions bows the soul in conscious shame. A change of theme is a relief to the mentally distressed. The moment the soul becomes concerned about its sins, it becomes anxious about their removal. This anxiety is the dawn of hope.

IV. Strengthened by the recollection that prayer and penitence are the conditions of deliverance. "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope" (ver. 21). He has seen his error in murmuring against the bitterness of his adversity. Complaints only increased his misery, but did nothing towards removing it. He now recalls how a sight of his sins had humbled him, and led him to pray for mercy, and knowing that God hears the cry of the sincerely penitent, he begins to cherish the hope of pardon and deliverance. It is in this way that God deals with the sinners of to-day. While men concentrate their thoughts upon their misfortunes, and rail against the Providence whose laws they have so recklessly broken, they shut themselves off from God and from hope; but when they acknowledge and grieve over their sins, and pray to God for the mercy provided for all men in Christ Jesus, they receive not only the hope, but the assurance of salvation.

LESSONS.—1. *Hope is the last link between sanity and utter mental collapse.* 2. *The greatest sufferer is never wholly without hope.* 3. *All true reform must begin in hope.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 18, 19. **Lost hope restored.** I. Hope has its highest realisation in God. II. When sin divorces the soul from God, its hope perishes. III. Only as the soul returns to God is its hope restored.

Vers. 20, 21. **The office of memory:** I. Plays an important part in our mental and spiritual history. II. Helps us to realise the nature and aggravation of our sins. III. Should lead us to a wise and timely humiliation on account of sin. IV. Prepares the way for a brighter and more hopeful future.

Ver. 21. **Memory, the handmaid of**

hope. Memory is very often the servant of despondency. She stands like a handmaiden, clothed in sackcloth, presenting to her master a cup of mingled gall and wormwood. Like Mercury, she hastes with winged heel to gather fresh thorns with which to fill the uneasy pillow, and to bind fresh rods with which to scourge the already bleeding heart. There is, however, no necessity for this. Wisdom will transform memory into an angel of comfort. She need not wear a crown of iron; she may encircle her brow with a fillet of

gold, all spangled with stars. We lay it down as a general principle, that if we would exercise our memories we might, in our darkest distress, strike a match which would instantaneously kindle the lamp of comfort. **I. Apply this principle to the believer in deep trouble.** The chapter contains a list of matters the recollection of which brought comfort to Jeremiah. 1. *The fact that, however deep our affliction, it is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed.* When you are kindling your household fire, before which you hope to sit down with comfort, you do not expect first to kindle the lumps of coal, but you set some lighter fuel in a blaze, and soon the more solid material yields a genial glow; so this thought, which may seem so light to you, may be as the kindling of a heavenly fire of comfort to you who are now shivering in your grief. 2. *His compassions fail not.* This again is not a very high step, but still it is a little in advance of the other, and the weakest may readily reach it. 3. *The Lord is my portion.* One of our kings, high and haughty in temper, had a quarrel with the citizens of London, and thought to alarm them by a dreadful threat that would cower the spirits of the bold burghers, for if they did not mind what they were at, he would remove his court from Westminster. Whereupon the doughty Lord Mayor begged to inquire whether his Majesty meant to take the Thames away, for so long as the river remained, his majesty might take himself where he pleased. Even so the world warns us, you cannot hold out, you cannot rejoice; this trouble shall come and that adversity shall befall. We reply, So long as you cannot take our Lord away, we will not complain. We have now advanced to some degree of hope, but there are other steps to ascend. 4. *The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him.* Let Him smite never so hard, yet if we can maintain the heavenly posture of prayer, we may rest assured that He will turn from blows to kisses yet. Bunyan tells us that when the city of Mansoul was besieged, it was the depth of

winter and the roads were very bad; but even then prayer could travel them. No enemy can barricade the road to the King. We are getting into deeper water of joy; let us take another step. 5. *It is good that a man should bear the yoke in his youth.* Why should I dread to descend the shaft of affliction if it leads me to the gold mine of spiritual experience? Why should I cry out if the sun of my prosperity goes down, if in the darkness of my adversity I shall be the better able to count the starry promises with which my faithful God has been pleased to gem the sky. Many a promise is written in sympathetic ink, which you cannot read till the fire of trouble brings out the characters. One step more, and surely we shall then have good ground to rejoice. 6. *The Lord will not cast off for ever.* Who told thee that the night would never end in day? Who told thee that the sea would ebb out till there should be nothing left but a vast tract of mud and sand? Who told thee that the winter would proceed from frost to frost, from snow, and ice, and hail, to deeper snow and yet more heavy tempest? Knowest thou not that day follows night, that flood comes after ebb, the spring and summer succeed to winter? Hope thou then! Hope thou ever, for God fails thee not. Thus memory may be, as Coleridge calls it, "the bosom-spring of joy." **II. To the doubting Christian who has lost his evidences of salvation:** 1. *Call to remembrance matters of the past.* At the south of Africa the sea was generally so stormy when the frail barks of the Portuguese went sailing south that they named it the Cape of Storms; but after that cape had been well rounded by bolder navigators, they named it the Cape of Good Hope. In your experience you had many a Cape of Storms, but you have weathered them all, and now let them be a Cape of Good Hope to you. 2. *Recall the fact that others have found the Lord true to them.* 3. *Remember that if you look within you will see some faint traces of the Holy Spirit's hand.* The complete picture of Christ is not there, but cannot you see the crayon sketch,

the outline, the charcoal marks? Where God the Holy Ghost has done as much as that, He will do more. 4. *Recollect that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.* If I am not a saint, I am a sinner; and if I may not go to the throne of grace as a child, I will go as a sinner. III. **A few words to seekers.** Oh, that I had a voice like the trumpet of God that shall wake the dead at last! If I might only have it to utter one sentence, it would be this one, "In Christ is your help found." As for you, there never can be found anything hopeful in your human nature. It is death itself, it is rottenness and corruption. Turn, turn away your eyes from this despairing mass of black depravity and look to Christ.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—The misery of hopelessness. Abraham Lincoln, when a young man, was subject to terrible fits of depression. In one of his letters he writes: "I am now the most miserable being living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better I cannot tell; I awfully forbode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better."

Hope presupposes faith. They cannot exist apart. Hope is the balloon of the soul, soaring majestically into the heavens, scanning scenes of beauty and grandeur never beheld by our earth-bound senses, and faithfully reporting to the soul the state of affairs in the skies; but it is a captive balloon, and the connecting cords are firmly held in the hand of faith. The loftiest flights and the swing of what may seem the most eccentric gyrations of hope are held in check by the friendly, the sympathetic, and unswerving grasp of faith. "My dear Hope," says Faith, "it is very

nice for you to be up there basking in the cloudless sunshine and drinking in the melody of the ascending lark as it ripples up the heights; and I like you to be there. I could never get there myself; and you tell me of things I should never otherwise know, and they do me good. But remember, I cannot let you go. We are necessary to each other, and cannot do without each other. If you were to break away from me, you would vanish like vapour into space, and I should be left forlorn and powerless."

Hope clings to us to the last. When John Knox lay dying, one of the friends around his death-bed asked the question, "Hast thou hope?" The veteran reformer was too weak to speak—the moment for speech was gone; but the expiring saint raised his finger and pointed upwards, and so passed triumphantly to the skies.

Prayer a preparation for conflict. A soldier in the Confederate army was once asked what was the secret of Stonewall Jackson's influence over his men. "Does your general abuse you, swear at you to make you march?" "Swear!" answered the soldier. "No; Ewell does the swearing; Stonewall does the praying! When Stonewall wants us to march, he looks at us soberly, just as if he were sorry for us, and says, 'Men, we've got to make a long march.' We always know when there is going to be a long march and right smart fighting, for old Jack is powerful on prayer just before a big fight."

Memory of victory inspiring. During the last days of William IV. the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo occurred. Rousing himself upon remembrance of it, the dying King requested that some of the French standards taken there should be brought to him, which when he looked at and handled he said, "I feel much better."

HOMILETICS.

THE DIVINE FAITHFULNESS.

(Vers. 22–24.)

I. Evidenced in our preservation in the midst of the greatest afflictions. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (ver. 22). The same Divine

power that called us into being is exerted every moment to sustain that being. The enemies of our life threaten us every moment. We walk in the midst of secret and unsuspected dangers. A whiff of subtle and mysterious vapour, and the throb of life is for ever stilled; the crumbling of a few inches of shale beneath our feet, and we are precipitated into the abyss of death; the slightest overbalance on the slippery deck, and we are immersed in a watery grave; the accidental divergence of the knife or firing of the rifle, and we receive our death-wound; the horse stumbles, and the rider lies dead at its feet; the lightning flashes, and the unsuspecting passer-by is stricken into a livid corpse; the careering locomotive leaves the metals, and many homes are darkened with desolation and sorrow; the volcano opens its treacherous side, and thousands are swallowed into the depths of its burning lava. How unfathomable is the mercy and how un-deviating the faithfulness that have spared us to this hour! "One shall be taken and another left;" but how is it that others are taken and we are left? How is it that we have been to so many funerals, and no one has yet been to ours?

II. Revealed in its greatness by the daily renewal of the Divine mercies. "They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (ver. 23). Our wants are constant; so is the Divine provision. The arrest in the outflow of Divine mercies for a single day would mean unspeakable suffering to millions. The Divine supply is ever ahead of our daily needs. Every Divine blessing has the freshness and the fragrance of the morning about it. "They are new every morning"—unfailing as the morning dawn, bright and joyous as the morning sunshine, brilliant and sparkling as the morning dew, sweet and invigorating as the morning air. Every new day, as it pours its cornucopia of gifts upon the world, is an infallible witness to the Divine faithfulness.

III. Is the assured foundation of the soul's hope. "The Lord is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him" (ver. 24). The hope of the prophet began to dawn amidst the deepest gloom when he remembered that God answered prayer (ver. 21); but now it is strengthened and confirmed when he is assured of the constancy of the Divine mercy. Israel's hope of help from Egypt, or from any of her professed allies, was shattered, that she might be taught to seek refuge alone in God. Amid the wreckage of all earthly hopes the soul finds a sure foundation for hope and confidence in the unchangeable mercy and faithfulness of God.

LESSONS.—1. *Affliction which reveals the fickleness of earthly things also reveals the unchanging faithfulness of God.* 2. *Daily mercies are constant reminders of the Divine faithfulness.* 3. *The Divine faithfulness is at once the hope and satisfaction of the soul.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 22, 23. **The views of a saint in his afflictions.** He contemplates—

1. *The lightness of his affliction in comparison of his deserts.*

2. *The multitude of the mercies yet continued to him.*

3. *The unchangeableness of God under all His dispensations.*

4. *The beauty of religion as displayed in these views.*

They compose the mind, elevate the soul, and honour God.—*Simeon.*

Ver. 23. **Dayspring mercies.** I. These words seem to speak of the *inexhaustible wealth of God's forgiveness.*

But for the daily renewal of God's mercy to His people they would have been utterly cut off. His faithfulness to the covenant was great beyond all human parallel. No new day would ever brighten and glow over the cowed, comfortless, half-relenting remnant of the holy seed, but for God's readiness to forgive. They had sinned away their covenant birthright, but God's compassion hovered near to restore it again. And is it not ever so with God's people? In times of chastisement and in times of prosperity alike they need to be ever encircled by God's

forgiving grace. Close by one of the great cities of the East there is a large stretch of grass that is always green. Sometimes the showers are rare and scanty, and the thermometer mounts to an appalling height, and one wonders to see the grass green and lush as though it were growing in some English meadow. It is kept so by a heavy dew that never fails to fall in the night-time. And so with our life of consecration. There is no dawn without the dew of abounding love and compassion descending to keep it green.

II. These words seem to suggest the *resourcefulness of Divine Providence*. The mercy that is ever fresh to pardon is ever fresh to guide and shape the circumstances in the midst of which the pardoned life is spent. The text is in direct conflict with the clock-work theory of the universe. Providence glories in freshness and originality—it abhors unintelligent routine. The tied-up helm and the sail square-set to the wind are no types of God's providential methods of dealing with us. Life is full of bends and rapids and shallows and whirlpools, and an automatic providence will not meet the terrific emergencies of its swiftly passing moments. Sail and helm alike are in His hand, and answer to His touch through every flashing second. Astronomers at one time puzzled themselves over a problem in solar physics. How was the heat of the sun maintained? It seemed a natural inference that, as it was always giving off heat in stupendous volumes, ultimate exhaustion must one day come. Within recent times the suggestion has found wide acceptance that the sun is constantly drawing meteors, asteroids, and comets to itself, and that the heat is maintained by the impact of these bodies as they fall into the sun. Things come to us from time to time that seem out of all accord with the harmonies around us. Strange difficulties, stumbling-blocks, tribulations, start up in the path of our daily life. These things are drawn into the circle of God's control and government for their solution, and it is in this way that the very glory of God's providence is maintained.

III. These words seem to suggest the *unfailing truth and faithfulness of God in His relation to His people*. God's renewed mercies are linked with the morning because the return of the day is one of the most perfect and intelligible symbols of constancy to be found in the economy of Nature. The rains may come and go upon a system to which science has found no clue. Winter sometimes pushes itself far on into the spring. A late spring and an early autumn may squeeze out the summer. A flood may quite change the face of a country. Islands have been known to disappear in some of the convulsions of Nature. The mariner has looked for his landmark, and it is gone. Empires may rise and perish with no hope of a resurrection other than an ignoble disinterment at the hands of the archæologist. But no ill chance can befall the day-spring. And as infallibly as the welcome day-dawn steals at its own hour into our homes, so infallibly do the Divine compassions arise upon the lowly and the contrite. God reflects the benignity of His own face into the flush of dawn, and makes it the parable of a faithfulness upon which you can always count. IV. These words suggest the *unfailing promptness of God's ministrations*. "His mercies are new every morning;" that is, just as soon as, or even before, we begin to need them. We receive our salvation, guidance, and defence, not of our own work, but of His free love. If it were of our own work, we must needs wait for the nightfall before we could receive any recompense. Wages are paid at sunset. But it is all His gift. So the mercy in which we rejoice comes to us with the dawn, before we have done a solitary stroke of work. The regulations of the court at Pekin are so framed as to give to the Chinese Empire an example of promptness and despatch. The emperor always receives his cabinet ministers and councillors at three or four o'clock in the morning—long before day-dawn. And so God awaits His servants with new pardons, new counsels, new honours in His kingdom, long before the day-dawn. An in-

genious botanist, by watching the hours at which certain flowers opened, hit upon the pretty conceit of constructing what he called a flower-clock. God's matchless mercies, like circles of thick-set bloom that break into splendour with a rhythm that never halts, are measuring out the successive hours of our life. No winter comes to blast the flowers, and the clock is never behind time. V. These words suggest the *perpetual freshness of the Divine Nature*. God's compassions are unceasingly new because they well, pure and fair, out of the stainless and infinite depths of His Fatherhood. They have the ever-renewed and living sweetness of His own spring-like nature in them. His daily mercies come to us clothed with the enkindled grace of His own matchless smile, and full of the light of an immortal May-time. He cannot give or do without putting the buoyancy of His own untiring and eternal youth into each boon and act.—*T. G. Selby*.

Ver. 24. (Compared with Deut. xxxii. 9). **Choice portions.** I. **The Lord's portion is His people.** 1. *The Church of God is the Lord's own peculiar and special property.* As a king may have ample possessions, to all of which he has undoubted right, but still has royal demesnes and crown-lands which are in a very special sense his own, so hath the Lord of all a peculiar interest in His saints. They are His by sovereign choice, by purchase and by conquest. 2. *The saints are the objects of the Lord's especial care.* The Lord is the eternal watcher of the universe and never sleeps; yet in a very distinct sense He is the guardian of His Church. 3. *The Church is the object of the Lord's special joy.* I do not read that God delighteth in the cloud-capped mountains or in the sparkling stars, but I do read that He delighteth in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights are with the sons of men. 4. *God's people are His everlasting possession.* He will never sell His people at any price, nor, if He could have better people instead, would He change them. They are His for ever. II. **The Lord is my portion.** 1. *True believers have the Lord as their*

sole portion. St. Augustine was wont very often to pray, "Lord, Give me thyself." A less portion than this would be unsatisfactory. 2. *As God is our only portion, so He is our own portion.* Do not be satisfied with generals; come to particulars. Men go to hell in bundles, but they go to heaven separately. 3. *The Lord is to His people an inherited portion.* We owe it to the fact of our birth—a child of God by being born in the image of His son. 4. *This heritage is ours by choice.* We have chosen God to be our portion. Better to have Christ and a fiery faggot than to lose Him and wear a royal robe. 5. *God is His people's settled portion.* The covenant of day and night may be broken, the waters may again cover the earth, sooner than the decrees of grace be frustrated. *The Lord is my all-sufficient portion.* God fills Himself. If He is all-sufficient in Himself, He must be all-sufficient for us.—*C. H. Spurgeon*.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — Divine faithfulness. Visiting a dying Christian woman, Dr. John Brown once said to her, "What would you say, Janet, if, after God has done so much for you, He should let you drop into hell?" She calmly replied, "E'en as He likes; but He'll lose more than I will."

— You may be faint and weary, but my God cannot. I may fluctuate and alter as to my frames and feelings, but my Redeemer is unchangeably the same. I might utterly fail and come to nothing if left to myself; but I cannot be so left to myself, for the Spirit of Truth hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." He will renew my strength, either by changing my weakness into strength, or by enduing me with His own power. He is wise to foresee and provide for all my dangers. He is rich to relieve and succour me in all my wants. He is faithful to perfect and perform all His promises.—*Ambrose Serle*.

Divine Providence. It is the fault of the present day to think and to act as if man could do everything, and to forget God's special providence. Hence

that busybodiness which distinguishes the religious world, and prevents that depth of piety which is the result of sober, calm reflection, and which shows itself in doing calmly and unostentatiously, not what seems likely to be attended with the greatest results, but simply the duty our hand findeth to do.—*Dean Hook*.

— Those believers who watch providences will never lack providences to watch.—*Flavell*.

Divine supply in emergencies. St. Cuthbert of Lindisfarne was often in great poverty and pinched for food. "Never did man die of hunger who

served God faithfully," he would say when night found them supperless in the waste. "Look at the eagle overhead! God can feed us through him, if He will!"—and once, at least, he owed his meal to a large fish that the scared bird let fall.

Want anticipated. The wood-piercing bee will make a tunnel in a tree-trunk twelve or fifteen inches long and half an inch wide, which is divided into ten or twelve cells. An egg with a store of pollen and honey is deposited in each cell, so that as soon as the young bee is born it has its dinner awaiting it!—*Ruskin*.

HOMILETICS.

THREE GRADES OF GOODNESS.

(Vers. 25–27.)

I. There is the goodness of Jehovah to those who cling to Him. "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him" (ver. 25). God is absolutely and supremely good—good in Himself, good in all things, good at all times. If He is good to all, then He must be especially so to those who wait on Him in conscious dependence and earnestly supplicate His help. There are mysteries about the Divine procedure which we cannot fathom, and we are sometimes tempted to question the goodness of God. But clearer light dispels our doubts, and the more completely we trust in Him the more real and tender and potent does His goodness become. We never know God aright till we trust Him fully.

II. There is the goodness of patient and uncomplaining waiting for God's time of deliverance. "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord" (ver. 26). To indulge in querulous complaints only increases the irritation of our sufferings. Murmuring begets murmuring, and we are apt to blame every one but ourselves. The more we grumble, the farther are we away from goodness. It is only when we are silent and abstain from complaining that we begin to see that our deliverance must come from God, and that it is our wisdom to bide His time and humbly submit to His method. The soul attains goodness by exercising an active and larger faith in the Divine goodness. A clearer apprehension of goodness in God begets a corresponding goodness in the soul that sees it.

III. There is the goodness of being accustomed to the burden of suffering early in life. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (ver. 27). Youth is the period of enjoyment, and it has a pleasure all its own, with its bright and gay romancing, its poetic dreams of beauty and delight, its relishable love of work, its daring enterprise and bold ambitions, its soaring hopes and confident prophecies, its sparkling wit and brimming fun—brilliant and harmless as tropical lightning; buoyant, radiant, joyous youth-time, when every sense is steeped in the intoxicating nectar of innocent rapture, when the whole world shines with the golden glory of perpetual summer, and when life is one long, sweet poem, set to the enchanting movements of exquisite music. But youth has

also its burdens and responsibilities, and its happiness is not destroyed but intensified when it learns to bear with bravery the disappointments and afflictions of life. The youth who has known little of suffering is ill prepared for the stern realities of ordinary life. Early sorrow brings early comfort and peace and strength. The best that is in man is tested and perfected by misfortune.

LESSONS.—1. *God is good in Himself inherently and essentially.* 2. *Man is good only in the degree in which he receives Divine grace and submits to the Divine discipline.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 25. **The Divine goodness.** 1. A grand reality. 2. Continually manifested. 3. Specially revealed to the earnest seeker.

Ver. 26. **The advantages of a state of expectation.** 1. It seems implied that our incapacity of looking into the future has much to do with the production of disquietude and unhappiness. 2. And yet the possession of this power of anticipating the future would be incalculably more detrimental. 3. Our ignorance of what shall happen stimulates exertion. We are so constituted that to deprive us of hope would be to make us inactive and wretched. 4. It is for our advantage that salvation, instead of being a thing of certainty and present possession, must be hoped and quietly waited for. 5. If true believers were withdrawn from earth at the moment of their becoming such, the influences of piety which now make themselves felt through the mass of a population would be altogether destroyed, and the world deprived of that salt which alone preserves it from total decomposition. 6. No fair explanation can be given of the text unless you bring into the account the difference in the portions to be assigned hereafter to the righteous. 7. The continuance of the justified on earth affords them opportunity of rising higher in the scale of future blessedness. 8. Being compelled to hope and to wait is a good moral discipline, so that the exercises prescribed are calculated to promote holiness and ensure happiness. 9. It is good as affording time in which to glorify God. 10. Religion gives a character to hope of which otherwise it is altogether destitute. Hope is a beautiful meteor; but

nevertheless this meteor, like the rainbow, is not only lovely because of its seven rich and radiant stripes; it is the memorial of a covenant between man and his Maker, telling us that we are born for immortality, destined, unless we sepulchre our greatness, to the highest honour and noblest happiness. —*Henry Melville.*

Hope and patience. I. *What is meant by the salvation of the Lord?* God's salvation is used very frequently in the Bible for His interposition to save the soul of man from sin. It is not this salvation which is here spoken of, for though a man may be encouraged to hope, he cannot be urged quietly to wait for it. The language of the chapter is not that of a man ignorant of God. It is the salvation which a man needs in any crisis of life, where he suffers under trial, or is threatened with it. Our strength and resources, all possible expedients, have been brought into exercise. The last reserve has been thrown into the battle, and yet it goes against us. It is then the case rises distinctly into the salvation of the Lord. A man who has faith only in worldly resources is powerless here. He must give up in despair, or cast himself on a blind chance. But, for a believing man, there is still a duty and a stay. When he cannot take a step farther in human effort, there is a pathway to the skies, and his heart can travel it. II. *What is meant by these exercises of the soul towards God's salvation—to hope and quietly wait?* 1. The foundation of hope lies in desire. But desire may pursue things that can never be objects of hope to us. We can only hope for that which is felt to be possible and reasonable. The next element is *faith*.

But we believe in many things in regard to which we do not hope. Hope is faith with desire pointing out the objects. A third element to make our hope strong is *imagination*. While sin has made this world a charnel-house of corruption or a storehouse of vanities, purity can fill its treasury with divine aspirations which are as grand as they are transcendently real. II. *Quiet waiting*. It is termed in the Bible *patience*. It is the part of hope to seek the future; it is the duty of patience to rest calmly in the present, exercising faith, and giving calm attention to duties. The tamest and most insignificant of daily duties may be made noble and divine when the thought of God and the will of Christ are carried into them. III. *Consider the benefit of uniting these—both to hope and quietly wait*. 1. The one is needful to save the other from sinking into sin. 2. To raise the other to its full strength. 3. It is good now in the depth of the soul, in the conscious assurance that it is better to rest in the hardest of God's ways than to wander at will in our own. 4. It is good in the enhancement of every blessing for which we have to wait. Between your use of the means and the result which you desire there is still a gulf of separation, on the brink of which Patience must sit and look across, waiting God's time and way to pass it.—*John Ker, D.D.*

Ver. 27. **Youth the proper season of discipline.** I. In the principles of true religion. II. In the arts of honest industry.—*Berriman*.

The best burden for young shoulders. The bullocks have to bear the yoke. They go in pairs, and the yoke is borne upon their shoulders. If the bullock is not broken in when young, it will never make a good ploughing ox. So it is good for us when young to learn obedience, to acquire knowledge, and to encounter difficulties and troubles. I. *It is good to be a Christian while you are young*. 1. The man whose heart is conquered by Divine grace early is made happy soon. 2. Is saved from a thousand snares. 3. Is saved from having his shoulders galled with the

devil's yoke. 4. Gives him longer time in which to serve God. 5. Enables him to be well established in Divine things. II. *It is good for young Christians that they bear the yoke of Jesus*. 1. They render to Jesus complete obedience from the very first. 2. They attain clear instruction in Divine truth. 3. They serve Christ early. 4. It is good to meet with difficulties and persecution in youth. III. *Practically we are all of us in our youth*. 1. Bearing the yoke, the old Adam is kept in check. 2. We are helpful to others who have known affliction. 3. Will make heaven all the sweeter.—*Spurgeon*.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The goodness of God experienced.** A German just converted was greatly surprised at the goodness of God to him, which he now realised. One day he was overheard in prayer saying, "O Lord Jesus! I did not know Thou wert so good!" How general is this ignorance!

Patience conquers. Twenty-five years ago the founder of a college for negroes in America was hunted like a wild beast through the region where his name is now spoken by men of all parties with reverence. Lloyd Garrison was nearly murdered by an infuriated mob for championing the emancipation of the slaves, and years afterwards, in the same city, was made the recipient of its highest honours. Time fights against every tyranny, and in favour of the tyrannised. To endure is to conquer.

Fellow-suffering silences complaints. During one of the campaigns in the American civil war, when the winter weather was very severe, some of Stonewall Jackson's men, having crawled out in the morning from their snow-laden blankets, half-frozen, began to abuse him as the cause of their sufferings. He lay close by under a tree, himself covered with snow, and heard all this; but, without noticing it, presently crawled out too, and, shaking off the snow, made some jocular remark to the nearest men, who had no idea he had ridden up in the night and lain down amongst them! The incident

ran through the army in a few hours, and reconciled his followers to all the hardships of the expedition, and fully re-established his popularity.

Skill acquired in youth. Livy says that at the siege of Samè one hundred slingers were brought from Ægeum, Patræ, and Dymæ. These men, according to the practice of that nation, were exercised from their childhood in throwing with a sling into the open sea the round pebbles which strew the shore. Being accustomed to drive their missiles through circular marks of small circumference placed at a great distance, they not only hit the enemy's heads, but any part of their faces they aimed at. These slings checked the Sameans from sallying out either so frequently or

so boldly, insomuch that they would sometimes from the walls beseech the Achæans to retire for a while and be quiet spectators of their fight with the Roman guards.

A brave youth. William Hunter, a London apprentice, was in 1555 ordered by a priest to attend mass. He refused, and one day was found reading the Bible in Brentwood Church. He fled. His father was seized, and to release him the boy returned and surrendered. He was imprisoned for nine months, then offered a bribe by Bishop Bonner if he would recant. To all he opposed a courageous resistance, and was burned at the stake in his native village, retaining to the last his religious sturdiness and bravery.

HOMILETICS.

RESIGNATION.

(Vers. 28-30.)

I. Should be borne in silence, recognising the hand of God in affliction. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because He hath borne it upon Him" (ver. 28). It is difficult for an active spirit to settle down contentedly and in silence in any kind of circumstances. We cannot rid ourselves of the idea that something is to be done, and we must do it. If our misfortunes come as the result of our own folly, we feel we must do something to repair the damage, little dreaming how utterly useless are all our endeavours. When at length the truth dawns upon us that God is at work in connection with our sufferings, the soul is at once subdued into silence and patiently waits the issue. Something like this was once the experience of the Psalmist (Ps. xxxix. 9).

II. Should be borne with reverential humility, knowing there is hope of deliverance. "He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope" (ver. 29). The putting the mouth in the dust indicates how completely the soul is prostrated before God in humility and reverential silence. The soul can bear any burden when it knows that the hand of God imposes it, and that He has still hold of it. While we are conscious God is in touch with our burden, there is always hope of its removal. It is when God leaves us to our fate that hope dies. Resignation is no evidence of hopelessness, but rather an evidence how firmly our hope is grounded. We could not so completely cease from all personal effort were we not so fully assured of Divine deliverance.

III. Should be borne without resentment, not shrinking from the bitterest dregs of the cup. "He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him; he is filled full with reproach" (ver. 30). We are to be resigned, but not insensible; submissive, but not apathetic. We are keenly alive to the reproaches heaped upon us by our enemies. Our very resignation is offensive to them, and is made a handle of scorn. It is hard to bear the jeers of others without retaliation. When our sufferings come through our fellow-men, it is but human to resent their attacks with indignation—to meet scorn with scorn. But when we are sensible our troubles come from God, we can more readily submit, and we have grace given to

bear, without resentment, all that it may please Him to impose upon us. Behind the divine severity there is unspeakable gentleness.

LESSONS.—1. *The greatest sorrow must be borne alone and in silence.* 2. *Murmuring and resentment will increase, but not relieve our sufferings.* 3. *A spirit of humble resignation secures the Divine compassion and help.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 28-30. **Silent suffering.** I. Not the less acute because endured in silence (ver. 28). II. Is bearable when the soul has a glimmering of hope (ver. 29). III. Shows that the sufferer has exhausted every possible ground for complaint (ver. 30).

Ver. 28. Retirement and silence.

"What then should be a sinner's course?
Silence to all save himself and his God.
And so also our Lord 'became dumb ;'
He still waited upon his Father ;
He made as if He had nothing to say.
How much more should we be silent in our
guilt !

Thou hast sinned in company,
Learn to do without company at all.
Thou hast dealt rudely with thy God,
Be content to be rudely dealt with.
Thou hast forsaken Him,
Be content to be forsaken.
Thou hast sinned in talk,
Be content to keep silence.
Thou hast sinned in selfish ways,
Be content, nay be glad, to be overlooked,
To be disappointed—forgotten.

The less thou art able to retire at fixed times,
Be the more watchful to do so at occasional
times.

Thou hast sinned in boasting,
Be sometimes silent, even from good words.
Thou hast sinned by cowardice,
Force thyself to speak—in truthfulness to
confess.

Accept bereavements, separations, estrangements,
As opportunities of penance assigned by
Him.

That He may open thy mouth at last,
To shew forth His praise,
And nothing but His praise."

—*Keble.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Resignation to the will of God.** A remarkable instance of Christian resignation was discovered on one particular occasion in the conduct of Archbishop Fénelon. When his illustrious and hopeful pupil, the Duke of Burgundy, lay dead in his coffin, and the nobles of his court, in all the pomp of silent sadness, stood around, the

Archbishop came into the apartment, and having fixed his eyes for some time on the corpse, broke out at length in words to this effect—"There lies my beloved prince, for whom my affections were equal to the tenderest regard of the tenderest parents. Nor were my affections lost ; he loved me in return with all the ardour of a son. There he lies, and all my worldly happiness lies dead with him. But if the turning of a straw would call him back to life, I would not for ten thousand worlds be the turner of that straw in opposition to the will of God."

Soul-growth aided by silence. Some of the best and most beautiful works are perfected in silence. In the making of plate-glass the process of pouring the melted material is so delicate, requiring such care and steadiness, that the men, impressed with the great danger of carelessness, usually preserve silence during the process.

Humility a help to knowledge. When the recent military expedition went to Lower Egypt, it was found that only the smallest boats could go great distances up the Nile. There are some truths that are only revealed to those who grow in loneliness and self-forgetfulness—secret teachings which are reserved for those who are intensely childlike in spirit. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Heroic endurance. One of the secrets of Victor Hugo's power over the French people was their memory of the following. When the disasters of the Franco-German war were falling thickly, and the iron band was closing round Paris, word came that Victor Hugo was coming to the city. He came at the very moment that the investment was complete, with the last train, the last breath of free air. On the way he had

seen the Bavarians, seen villages burned with petroleum, and he came to imprison himself in Paris. A memorable ovation was given him by the people, and they never forgot his voluntary sharing of their sufferings.

HOMILETICS.

THE TENDERNESS OF GOD.

(Vers. 31-33.)

I. Seen in the limitation of punishment. "For the Lord will not cast off for ever" (ver. 31). God has no delight in inflicting punishment. His righteousness imposes on Him the necessity of punishing sin. But punishment has its limits; and when those limits are exceeded, justice degenerates into cruelty. The tenderness of God is a universal safeguard against unduly prolonged punishment (Ps. lxxvii. 7-9).

II. Seen in the abundant manifestation of mercy. "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (ver. 32). Even in chastisement mercy triumphs over justice. Mercy provides a means of escape, not from justice, but from the worst consequences of transgression. "All the souls that were, were forfeit once; and He that might the vantage best have took found out the remedy." "God be *merciful* to me a sinner," is the leading idea of inscriptions on thousands of gravestones in the stately cathedral and the village churchyard, and bear silent testimony to the deepest convictions of mankind. The mercy of God will be conspicuous to the universe, and the theme of endless adoration.

III. Seen in the reluctance with which He inflicts chastisement. "For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (ver. 33). God never afflicts willingly—lit., *from his heart*. The heart of God is love, and love has no pleasure in the sufferings of others, and is not eager to impose suffering. That God afflicts at all, and that He does it with so much reluctance, should intensify the conviction that, not only is chastisement necessary, but that it is evidently intended to lead to a greater good. The prophet dwells on the tenderness of God to enforce complete resignation to the Divine arrangements.

LESSONS.—1. *God never punishes beyond the absolute necessity of the case.* 2. *He sympathises with the sufferer His justice compels Him to chastise.* 3. *He is ever slow to wrath.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 31-36. **Comfort for the sorrowful.** I. *A cheering assurance given.* 1. That God's abandonment of His people is only temporary. "For the Lord will not cast off for ever." 2. That the favour with which He will visit them will be signal and abundant. "But though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies." II. *An important reason adduced.* "For He doth not afflict willingly." This may be inferred: 1. From His character. He is a God of love. 2. From the relation-

ship He sustains to His people. He is their father. An earthly parent has to chastise his offspring, but He does it with reluctance. 3. Their sufferings are attended with many alleviations. Had He any pleasure in punishing us, so much mercy would not be mingled with judgment. 4. The object He has in view in afflicting His children: it is for their profit, that they may be partakers of His holiness. 5. His readiness to remove His chastening hand when the visitation has answered the end intended. III. *A gracious*

limitation subjoined. Whenever God afflicts, it is: 1. Within the bounds of moderation. To "crush" expresses what is extreme and destructive (Isa. xxvii. 8; Jer. x. 24, xlv. 28). 2. Never in violation of the principles of equity. "To subvert a man in his cause the Lord approveth not." He is the righteous Lord, who loveth righteousness, and all He doeth is in accordance therewith.—*Expository Outlines.*

Vers. 31-33. **Afflictions not accidental.** This apparent contradiction between the Divine compassion and our human griefs, between what we desire and need and what we feel to be real, is to-day what it has been from the beginning, the standing problem, the bitter tragedy of human life. It has but one solution. There is a mischief in man's nature producing discord in his condition, begetting the necessity and the mercy of a Divine chastening; and this, both in the end it contemplates and in the methods it employs, is a providence of compassion. I. *The fact that grief is the heritage of man.* Life is still the natural history of sorrow—man's life the bitterest of all. There are troubles that belong to the lot of individual man, and in this form they are the impartial inheritance of the race. There are troubles which afflict the community, which fall upon the mass in its aggregation of families, neighbourhoods, communities, and nations. The great and good, the beautiful and the wise, the aged and the young, all races and all conditions of men, have gone down under this terrible Euroclydon of grief. These facts are a difficulty to the Christian philosopher, but they are equally so to the sceptic. II. *Divine compassion in its relation to suffering.* 1. All human suffering comes within the foreknowledge and is under the control of God. 2. Many of our troubles, probably most of them, have their causes in ourselves. 3. There are troubles and afflictions, and these not few, which we must consider only as the punishment of sin. Strife is the essence of sin. It is self-will pitted in avowed antagonism to God. God will not vacate His sovereignty

because man rebels. He cannot be defeated or bribed, or bought off from His purpose, even by prayer. The bitter, bitter cup must be drunk; the chastisement must come. But with all this, there comes also the presence of an infinite compassion. He succours His children while the law oppresses them. He delivers them speedily when its mission is accomplished.—*J. Burton.*

Vers. 32, 33. **God the consolation of the afflicted.** I. *A revealed fact.* "God doth not willingly afflict the children of men." This fact rests upon another fact—the teaching of Scripture regarding the providence of God. A particular and special providence is the sole ground of prayer; prayer being the basis of all true religion. When the mind dwells upon the special providence of God, it learns the more difficult task of submitting to all afflictive dispensations with thanksgiving. II. *The passage appears to stand opposed to the omnipotence of God.* God is Almighty, but He has willed to set limits to the exercise of His omnipotence. He abides by the laws He has himself enacted. The law connects life and happiness with obedience. But the law would cease to exist if life and happiness were dispensed also to the disobedient. The law was magnified when God Himself, in the person of His Son, yielded obedience to it. God will not by His omnipotence overrule or supersede the freedom of the human will. If we be not true to ourselves, He will at length, after trial, leave us to our own devices. It is an awful thought that a man may outlive the day of grace. He may remain a *thing* upon earth to subserve some purpose in the providence of God, but as a *person* his trial may have ceased. If one of the purposes of affliction is to correct and amend us, one of the means of avoiding affliction must be to endeavour to shape our lives according to the law of God. When afflictions do come, it is an ineffable consolation to be assured all things are ordered by God for our good. III. *The histories of good men illustrate the truth of the text.* We learn why afflictions were imposed upon them. Study the lives

of Jacob, Joseph, David, Job, and Christ.—*W. F. Hook, D.D.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Chastisement a proof of God's tenderness.** It is true to be struck once in anger is fearful. God's displeasure is more than His blow. Fear not; these stripes are the tokens of His love. He is no son that is not beaten, yea, till he smart and cry, if not till he bleed. No parent corrects another's child; and he is no good parent that corrects not his own. O rod worthy to be kissed, that assures us of His love, of our adoption!—*Bp. Hall.*

"Heaven is not always angry when He strikes,
But most chastises those whom most He likes,"—*Pomfret.*

Affliction God's messenger. Luther used to say there were many of the

Psalms he could never understand till he had been afflicted. Rutherford declared he had got a new Bible through the furnace. Hard weather tries what health we have; afflictions try what sap we have, what grace we have. Withered leaves soon fall off in windy weather; rotten boughs quickly break with heavy weights.

Afflictions overruled. Artists and composers have often been helped in their studies by their physical infirmities. Bach's blindness, Beethoven's deafness, making society and social distractions almost impossible, drove them in upon their own genius, and compelled them to listen to the voice of God within them. Some beauties of character and achievement can only be secured by retirement and solitude, and affliction often compels to this.

HOMILETICS.

GOD AND HUMAN WRONG.

(Vers. 34–36.)

I. God approves not wanton cruelty towards prisoners of war. "To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the earth" (ver. 34). Jeremiah was probably a daily witness of cruelties suffered by the captives. One of the greatest horrors of ancient warfare was the inhuman treatment of prisoners. Any exception to this, history does not fail to record as a remarkable example of clemency and forbearance. Few men can be trusted with unrestricted power. Where there is no fear of immediate consequences to himself, man rapidly develops into a monster of cruelty. The helplessness of captives appeals to the pity of the tyrant. Every act of inhumanity God not only disapproves, but will certainly punish.

II. God approves not the base attempt to procure an unjust sentence before any legal tribunal. "To turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High" (ver. 35), of a superior, or before a legal tribunal acting in the name of God (Exod. xxi. 6; xxii. 8, 9). An oppressor who would hesitate to commit an act of cruelty in public does not scruple to stoop to the basest arts in secret to pervert the course of justice. Happy is the nation where the judgment-seat is beyond the reach of corruption.

III. God approves not the perversion of justice in any case, or in any degree. "To subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not" (ver. 36). No act of wrong, whether open or secret, can escape the All-seeing Jehovah, nor can it escape punishment. Tyranny is not supreme, and its reign is always short-lived. God is the implacable foe of all injustice; and the oppressed everywhere are sure to be relieved and vindicated.

LESSONS.—1. *Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.*
2. *God is not an indifferent spectator of the wrong inflicted by one man upon another.* 3. *God will certainly interfere to redress all human wrongs.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 34-36. **The Divine character.**
 1. Gives dignity and significance to every legal tribunal. 2. Is a perpetual protest against every act of cruelty and injustice. 3. Is a guarantee that justice will be ultimately triumphant.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—The beginning of wrong. An old writer says, "A man who goes to law finds the court full of invisible hooks. First his cloak, then the skirts of his coat, then his sleeves, till everything is torn from him, and, like a gypsy, he escapes because there is no further hold upon him." The youth who crosses the threshold of the court of vice will find those invisible hooks sharper and in greater abundance than in courts of law. Once caught, he will be hooked in every direction. One tempter will succeed another, each handing him over to the next. Thus snared and dragged from vice to vice, until denuded of every virtue, he will at last, in all probability, perish in unutterable woe.—*Dr. Wise.*

Justice expedited. Juvenalis, a widow, complained to Theodoric, king of the Romans, that a suit of hers had been in court three years. The king being informed who were her judges, gave orders that they should give all expedition to the poor woman's cause, and in two days it was decided to her satisfaction. Theodoric then summoned the judges before him, and inquired how it was that they had done

in two days what they had delayed for three years. "When I put you in office," said the king, "did I not consign all pleas and proceedings to you? You deserve death for having delayed that justice for three years which two days could accomplish." He commanded them to be beheaded.

Injustice and anger. There is an anger that is damnable: it is the anger of selfishness. There is an anger that is majestic as the frown of Jehovah's brow: it is the anger of truth and love. If man meets with injustice, it is not required that he shall not be roused to meet it; but if he is angry after he has had time to think upon it, that is sinful. The flame is not wrong, but the coals are.—*Beecher.*

Suffering preferred to injustice. While Athens was ruled by the thirty tyrants, Socrates was summoned to the senate-house and ordered to go with some other persons to seize one Leon, a man of rank and fortune, whom they determined to put out of the way that they might enjoy his estate. The commission Socrates flatly refused, and, not satisfied therewith, added also his reasons for such refusal. "I will never willingly," said he, "assist in an unjust act." Cherides sharply replied, "Dost thou think, Socrates, to talk always in this style and not to suffer?" "Far from it," added he, "I expect to suffer a thousand ills, but none so great as to do unjustly."

HOMILETICS.

THE DIVINE RULE ABSOLUTE AND UNIVERSAL.

(Vers. 37-39.)

I. That nothing happens without the Divine knowledge and sanction. "Who is he that saith and it cometh to pass when the Lord commandeth it not?" (ver. 37). The curse causeless does not come. Somehow, somewhere, and for some purpose, there is running all through the seething mass of what appears to us little else than a complex of sorrowful accidents, the activity of a prescient foreknowledge, a permissive providence, a governing will. "We see only results. To God, the beginning, with its antecedents all hidden and remote, is a presence. The wildest freaks of chance, as they seem, the most exorbitant anomalies in

nature, the slightest incidents in the constitution of mind or matter, storm, earthquake and fires, the shoot of an avalanche, the dropping of a leaf, the wanderings of a comet, the birth, life, history, and death of a man, all come within the foreknowledge and are beneath the sovereign sweep of the purposes of God."

II. That the mingling of adversity and prosperity is in harmony with the administration of infinite wisdom. "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (ver. 38). If the life of man was an uninterrupted series of calamities, we might gravely question the wisdom and goodness of the Great Ruler; but the evil and the good are so nicely balanced one over against the other, that when God has finished His work there shall be no just ground for complaint (Eccles. vii. 14). The old divines used to say, "God is too wise to err, too good to be unkind."

III. That, while life is continued, man should not murmur over his punishment, but repent of the sins which made that punishment necessary. "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (ver. 39). The word *living* is emphatic, and implies that while God spares man's life he has no room to murmur. Life is a boon that transcends in significance any amount of temporary suffering. Life is a grand opportunity for repentance, reform, and the accomplishment of noblest purposes. Every moment in life spent in complaining is worse than wasted. When we understand how completely the Divine mind is governing everything, we begin to grasp the true significance of life.

LESSONS.—1. *The government of the world is in the hands of a wise and loving God.* 2. *Affliction when used aright may be an unspeakable blessing.* 3. *Life is a gift fraught with great moral issues.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 39. Complaint under affliction.

I. *Some complaints allowable.* 1. It is lawful to express what we feel and suffer in those ways Nature prompts us. 2. May complain to friends, relations, and acquaintances. 3. To God as well as to men. II. *Complaints prompted by impatience with God's dealings condemned.* 1. It is long before God takes the rod in hand to correct. 2. He is soon prevailed with to lay it aside. 3. He lays no more on us than our sins deserve. 4. We enjoy many mercies in the meantime by which the bitterness of affliction is allayed. 5. God has a sovereignty of power and dominion to deal with us as He pleaseth. III. *Complaints may be silenced:* 1. By keeping alive in your heart a sense of God's love in every dispensation. 2. By labouring to have a fresh remembrance of your sins. 3. By considering the extreme danger of quarrelling with and opposing God.—*Conant.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Spiritual insight into the Divine rule.** There seems to be in religious men a prophetic faculty of insight into the true bearings of outward things—an insight which puts to shame the sagacity of statesmen, and claims for the sons of God, and only for them, the wisdom even of the world. Those only read the world's future truly who have faith in principle as opposed to faith in human dexterity; who feel that in human things there lies truly and really a spiritual nature, a spiritual connection, a spiritual tendency, which the wisdom of the serpent cannot alter and scarcely can affect.—*Froude.*

Submission to God's will. Stonewall Jackson was once asked, "Suppose, in addition to blindness, you were condemned to be bedridden and racked with pain for life; you would hardly call yourself happy then?" He paused, and said with great deliberateness, "Yes, I think I could. My faith in the Almighty wisdom is absolute, and

why should this accident change it?" Touching him upon a tender point—his impatience of anything bordering on dependence—the test was pushed further. "If, in addition to blindness and incurable infirmity and pain, you had to receive grudging charity from those on whom you had no claim, what then?" There was a strange reverence in his lifted eye, and an exalted expression over his whole face, as he replied with slow deliberateness, "If it was God's will, I think I could lie there content a hundred years!"

Evil overruled. Henry the Eighth's divorce of Queen Catherine, and the refusal of the Pope to sanction it, led indirectly to the English Reformation and to the flinging off of the Papal temporal ecclesiastical power.

A life well lived. Tyndale's work was done. He lived to see the Bible no longer carried by stealth into his country, where the possession of it was a crime, but borne in by the solemn will of the king—solemnly recognised as the Word of the Most High God. And then his occupation in this earth was gone. His eyes saw the salvation for which he had longed, and he might depart to his place. He was denounced to the Regent of Flanders; he was enticed by the suborned treachery of a miserable English fanatic beyond the town under whose liberties he had been secured; and, with the reward which has been held fitting by human justice for the earth's great ones, he passed away in smoke and flame to his rest. —*Froude.*

HOMILETICS.

REPENTANCE.

(Vers. 40–42.)

I. Begins in strict self-examination. "Let us search and try our ways" (ver. 40). The discovery of ourselves is the discovery of sin. We never know how sinful we are till we thoroughly investigate our own hearts. The more we search, the more we see, and the conviction of our sin becomes an intolerable reality.

II. Involves a turning to God. "And turn again to the Lord" (ver. 40). The preposition is forcible, implying "Let us go back; not half way, but the whole." A repentance that spends itself in emotions and tears is ineffective. Sorrow for sin is but a symptom of repentance. Genuine repentance prompts to immediate and active moral reformation. Sin drives us from God: repentance brings us back to Him.

III. Is accompanied with earnest prayer. "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (ver. 41). In real prayer the outward form is the expression of the feeling of the heart. The heart lifts up the hands, and then with them rises in prayer to God. Deep emotion will find its own way of expression. Repentance reveals the need of help and forgiveness, and prayer is the expression of that need.

IV. Includes confession of sin. "We have transgressed and have rebelled" (ver. 42). The spell of hardness with which the soul was bound is broken when it is brought to the point of full and free confession of sin. There is often much humbling to be done before this point is reached. Confession of sin is an important proof of the genuineness of repentance, especially when attended with the other signs referred to.

V. Must be genuine and complete to secure forgiveness. "Thou hast not pardoned" (ver. 42). Why? Not because God is not merciful; not because He is unwilling to forgive; not because the opportunity is inappropriate: but because there is a lack of reality and sincerity in the penitent. The prescription of repentance is a revelation of forgiveness. God does not mock the sinner by

urging to repentance and then withholding forgiveness. If there is no eagerness for forgiveness, it is because there is something radically defective in the repentance.

LESSONS.—1. *Suffering should lead to reflection.* 2. *No amount of repentance can merit forgiveness.* 3. *God pardons only the penitent, not because of their penitence, but for His mercy's sake.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 40. **The duty of self-reflection.** I. *Its usefulness.* 1. Teaches us to know ourselves. 2. We discover our sins. 3. Provides good company and comfortable employment. II. *Its neglect mischievous.* 1. Hardens the heart. 2. A daily increase of sin. 3. Renders a man the more unwilling to reckon with himself. III. *Demands diligence.* 1. There is a natural reluctance to attend to the duty. 2. Many sins not easily discovered, unless diligent search is made. 3. A convenient time should be set apart for the work. 4. Affliction a time for heart-searching. 5. Let not the difficulty of the work discourage you. 6. A work that must be often repeated. IV. *Leads to repentance.* "Turn again to the Lord." Sin is an aversion and turning away from God; repentance is a returning to Him. 1. Repentance must be speedy. 2. Thorough. 3. Resolute and steadfast.—*Conant.*

Ver. 41. **The sublimity of devotion.** The finest and most sublime sensations of which the soul is susceptible are connected with the principle of devotion. I. *The sublimest books existing are those from which we learn our faith.* The writings of the inspired penmen abound with passages for which no parallel can be found in the productions of mere genius. Rousseau once exclaimed, "The majesty of the Scriptures fills me with astonishment; the holiness of the Gospel speaks to my very heart. Behold the books of the philosophers, with all their pomp, how little are they in comparison! Is it possible that a book at once so wise and so sublime should have been the production of mere men?" II. *Some of the situations of real life prove the intimate connection between devotion and the sources of sublime feeling.* 1. In studying the char-

acter of God and the works of Nature. 2. In the changing circumstances of life, in adversity or prosperity, the proper operation of religious thought is to call up sublime and fervent feelings. III. *Consider the subject of adoration—God, whether worshipped in private or in public.* If it be objected that in such an account of the effects of devout feeling, we place religion too much under the dominion of the imagination, it may be answered that though the abuse of a thing is dangerous, we are not therefore to relinquish its use. It is the soul that truly feels; imagination is the effort of the soul to rise above mortality. Imagination as well as reason is frequently appealed to in Scripture.—*Nares.*

ILLUSTRATIONS. — Repentance and confession.

Father, I scarcely dare to pray,
So clear I see, now it is done,
That I have wasted half my day,
And left my work but just begun :

So clear I see that things I thought
Were right or harmless were a sin ;
So clear I see that I have sought,
Unconscious, selfish aims to win :

So clear I see that I have hurt
The souls I might have helped to save ;
That I have slothful been, inert,
Deaf to the calls Thy leaders gave.

In outskirts of Thy kingdom vast,
Father, the humblest spot give me
Set me the lowliest task Thou hast,
Let me, repentant, work for Thee.

Repentance and forgiveness. No repentance is acceptable with God, but what is built or leans on the faith of forgiveness. We have a cloud of witnesses to this truth in the Scripture. Many there have been, many are recorded, who have been convinced of sin, perplexed about it, sorry for it,

who have made open confession and acknowledgment of it, who, under the present sense of it, have cried out even to God for deliverance, and have yet come short of mercy, pardon, and acceptance with God. The cases of Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, Judas, and others might be insisted upon.—*John Owen*.

Death-bed repentance. The English proverb says, "The river past and God forgotten," to express with how mournful a frequency He whose assistance was invoked—it may have been earnestly—in the moment of peril, is remembered no more, so soon as by His help the danger has been surmounted. And the Italian form of it sounds a still greater depth of ingratitude: "The peril past, the saint mocked"—the vows made to him in peril remaining unperformed in safety.—*Trench*.

—There is *one* case of death-bed repentance recorded, that no one should despair, and *only* one, that none should presume.—*Augustine*.

Repentance must be sincere. Lorenzo de' Medici lies dying in the city of Florence; in the terrors of death he has sent for the one man who had

never yielded to his threats or caresses—the brave Savonarola. Lorenzo confesses that he has heavy on his soul three crimes—the cruel sack of Volterra, the theft of the public dower of young girls, by which many were driven to a wicked life, and the blood shed after the conspiracy of Pazzi. He is greatly agitated, and Savonarola, to keep him quiet, keeps repeating, "God is merciful," "God is good." "But," he added, "there is need of three things." "And what are they, father?" "First, you must have a great and living faith in the mercy of God." "This I have, the greatest." "Second, you must restore that which you have wrongfully taken, or require your children to restore it for you." Lorenzo looks surprised and troubled; but he forces himself to compliance, and nods his head in sign of assent. Then Savonarola rises to his feet, and stands over the dying prince. "Last, you must give back their liberties to the people of Florence." Lorenzo, summoning up all his remaining strength, disdainfully turns his back, and, without uttering another word, Savonarola departs without giving him absolution.

HOMILETICS.

THE TENSION OF PROLONGED SUFFERING.

(Verses 43–47.)

I. Fosters exaggerated views of God's un pitying anger. "Thou hast covered with anger and persecuted us; Thou hast slain, Thou hast not pitied" (ver. 43). The people had acknowledged their sin and repented; but no relief came. Not only were they not pardoned, but it seemed as if the Divine wrath was more relentless than ever. The Chaldeans are still wrecking the holy city, and the citizens are being ignominiously dragged into captivity. The cloud of the Divine anger, instead of vanishing, thickens into darker threatenings of vengeance. This is one of the unvarying phases of continued suffering—every affliction is magnified into disproportionate dimensions.

II. Induces the hasty conclusion that prayer is useless. "Thou hast covered Thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through" (ver. 44). A deity so densely veiled is unapproachable. The veil is a cloud of wrath, and the suffering suppliant is stricken with terror and dismay. Prayer can never pierce so dense a cloud, and it is useless to try. The tension of prolonged suffering is apt to shake one's confidence in the utility of prayer, and suggest the doubt whether God is after all a prayer-hearing God. It is a great calamity when the soul restrains prayer.

III. Creates the impression that the sufferer is utterly despised and scorned. "Thou hast made us as the off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the

people. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us" (vers. 45, 46). There is nothing so depressing as suffering, and the sufferer is often the prey of self-depreciation and false imaginings, haunted with the idea that he is the sport and laughing-stock of others. It is the effect of sin to lower us in our own estimation, and it is a part of its punishment that we sink in the estimation of others.

IV. **Intensifies the feeling of hopeless ruin.** "Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction" (ver. 47). The light of hope, that flickered for a moment (ver. 21), is extinguished, and the sufferer relapses into dull, dead hopelessness (ver. 11). The enemy has completely hemmed in the city with his forces; his grip tightens, strategy and bravery succeed, the city falls, and is abandoned to riot and destruction. The protection of Jehovah is withdrawn, and, what is the most disheartening revelation of all, He now appears as an angry foe. Hope perishes when we discover that God is against us.

LESSONS.—1. *Excessive suffering is apt to impair the moral vision.* 2. *It is a calamity to lose faith in prayer when we most need its solace.* 3. *The outlook is not always so desperate as it appears to the despondent sufferer.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 43–47. **The pitilessness of the Divine anger:** I. As it appears to the abject sufferer (ver. 47). II. Seen in its relentless persecution (ver. 43). III. In its apparent indifference to human entreaty (ver. 44). IV. In abandoning its victims to the contempt and derision of others (vers. 45, 46).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Anger restrained more terrible. Writing upon the symbolical carvings of the ducal palace at Venice, Mr. Ruskin remarks that there is a figure of Anger represented by a woman tearing open her dress at her breast. Giotto represents this vice under the same symbol, but it is the weakest of all the figures in the Arena Chapel. The Wrath of Spencer rides upon a lion, brandishing a firebrand, his garments stained with blood. Rage, or Furor, occurs subordinately in other places. It occurs to me very strange that neither Giotto nor Spencer should have given any representation of the *restrained anger* which is infinitely the most terrible; both of them make him violent. God's forbearance of sin is restrained anger—not therefore less, but more terrible. The future retribution is not less, but more awful, since it is the wrath of the Lamb. Anger now restrained will be direr when once revealed. Long-suffering is a sign of suppressed indignation.

Perverted views of suffering. That extraordinary sufferings indicated extraordinary sins was contradicted by the Book of Job. So also consistent Pharisæism saw in the lowliness of Jesus His unworthiness, in His defencelessness His guilt, and after having crucified Him, in His cross His curse; whilst Jesus recognises therein His own glorification and the salvation of the world. The clouds that are the precursors of a storm do not appear so black to us when they hang immediately over our heads as when we see them rising up at the edge of the horizon. It is easier to know the worst than to dread the worst. All misfortunes appear more formidable at a distance than when we actually come to grapple with them.

Unjustifiable depression. In a fit of dejection Dean Hook once wrote—"My life has been a failure. I have done many things tolerably, but nothing well. As a parish priest, as a preacher, and now as a writer, I am quite aware that I have failed, and the more so because my friends contradict the assertion."

God does hear prayer. There is no such thing in the long history of God's kingdom as an unanswered prayer. Every true desire from a child's heart finds some true answer in the heart of God. Most certain it is that the prayer of the Church of God since creation has

not been the cry of orphans in an empty home without a Father to hear or answer. Jesus Christ did not pray in vain or to an unknown God, nor has

He spoken in ignorance of God or of His brethren when He says, "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full."—*Norman Macleod.*

HOMILETICS.

A SYMPATHETIC NATURE.

(Verses 48–51.)

I. Is pained by the evidences of national distress everywhere visible. "Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city" (ver. 51). What I see I feel. I see nothing but misery, and I feel nothing but pain. Amid the general suffering, the tender heart of the prophet mourned over the cruel fate of the Jewish maidens. This is a subject to which he often refers (ch. i. 4, 18; ii. 10, 21; v. 11). "Jeremiah suffered not in his own person, being under the protection of the Divine Being; but though he dwelt securely from the hand of mortality, yet he was filled with the bowels of sympathy. Though he wrote of the Jews' desolations, yet he named them Jeremiah's Lamentations."

II. Is aggravated in its grief because God, who sees the calamity, does not at once remove it. "Till the Lord look down and behold from heaven" (ver. 50). While the Lord looks down. He sees all this suffering; every feature of it is fully known to Him. Why does He not interfere? How can He be so indifferent to the agonies of His people? The prophet's heart is breaking, and it is a mystery and an addition to his pain that Jehovah does not haste to the rescue. Sympathy is not always wise. Our emotions are apt to swamp our judgment. God knows infallibly how much suffering is necessary, and when the right moment is come for Him to interpose.

III. Expresses its sorrow in a copious outflow of tears. "Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water, without any intermission" (vers. 48, 49). The measure of our being is our capacity for sorrow or joy. A certain traveller states that the shadow cast by Mount Hermon at some periods is as much as seventy miles long. A sensitive nature is susceptible of great sorrow, and has manifold ways of expressing the same. While the cause of sorrow remains, the sympathetic heart will mourn.

LESSONS.—1. *Callous indeed is the heart that can witness suffering without emotion.* 2. *The heart that loves intensely suffers intensely.* 3. *A sympathetic nature finds a merciful relief in tears.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 51. Sin the cause of suffering: I. To the patriot, as he sees its effect upon the nation. II. To the philanthropist, as he observes the mischief it works in the world. III. To the individual believer, as he is conscious of its presence in his own heart.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The power of sympathy.** Happy is the man who has that in his soul which acts upon the dejected as April airs upon violet roots.

Gifts from the hand are silver and gold; but the heart gives that which neither silver nor gold can buy. To be full of goodness, full of cheerfulness, full of sympathy, full of helpful hope, causes a man to carry blessings of which he is himself as unconscious as a lamp of its own shining. Such an one moves on human life as stars move on dark seas to bewildered mariners; as the sun wheels, bringing all the seasons with him from the south.—*Beecher.*

Grief leaves its mark. Sir Walter Scott says of himself after a sore bereavement, "I was broken-hearted for two years; and though handsomely pieced again, the crack will remain to my dying day."

Practical sympathy. When St. Remy was preaching before King Clovis of France, telling with passionate pathos the story of Christ's suffering and death, the monarch suddenly sprang from his throne, and, grasping his spear, cried,

"Had I been there with my brave Franks, I would have avenged His wrongs."

The relief of tears. A maniac while listening to a thrilling recital was moved to tears. Lifting her withered finger she exclaimed, "Do you see that tear? It is the first tear that I have shed for seven years, and it will relieve my poor burning head. I have often wished that I could weep, but I could not."

HOMILETICS.

A FAITHFUL PROPHET IN TROUBLE.

(Verses 52-58.)

I. Cruelly treated by his enemies. "Mine enemies chased me sore like a bird, without cause: I am cut off" (vers. 52-54). In these verses, and to the end of the chapter, Jeremiah deals with his own personal afflictions. Without the least provocation, he was treated with the most malignant enmity. He was harassed, as a bird is tired out, and at length run down by continuous pursuit. He is overwhelmed with trouble, and is as one imprisoned in a dungeon, shut off from the current of active life. He acknowledged the righteousness of the Divine dealings, but he was keenly alive to the unrighteousness and undeserved cruelty of his persecutors. Had he been the aggressor, he might have expected retaliation, but he was oppressed without cause. His enemies were actuated by sheer hatred. His only fault was his faithfulness to God and to his own conscience. Simple goodness often rouses the wanton animosity of the wicked.

II. Seeks refuge in prayer. "I called upon Thy name, O Lord; hide not Thine ear at my cry" (vers. 55, 56). It is a relief to turn from the cruelty of man to the compassion and power of God. The soul is never so helpless but that it can pray. When we can do nothing else, we can pray. Prayer is the language of need, and we are comforted with the assurance that God will hear, and not only hear but help. It seemed at one time that prayer was useless (ver. 44); but better thoughts prevailed, and the soul discovered that the cry for help was not in vain. "Prayer is the breath of the new man, sucking in the air of mercy in petitions and returning it in praises; it is both the evidence and the maintenance of the spiritual life."

III. Rescued by Divine aid. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee; Thou saidst, Fear not. O Lord, Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; Thou has redeemed my life" (vers. 57, 58). When we draw near to God in prayer, He draws near to us. Our troubles are overwhelming when God is absent and we are left to ourselves. With His manifested presence our troubles vanish, and we are inspired with strength to endure and to triumph.

LESSONS.—1. *Fidelity makes many enemies.* 2. *The nation that ill-uses its best men courts its own ruin.* 3. *The Lord is ever on the side of the faithful.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 54-57. **The efficacy of prayer.** I. These words show to what a state God's most favoured servants may be reduced—extreme suffering, tears, de-

spondency. II. The remedy open to them. Prayer expressed in cries, groans, breathings, sighs. III. The efficacy of that remedy whenever it is

applied. "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon Thee; Thou saidst, Fear not." In these words we hear the consolatory voice of God. Marvellous condescension; certainty of help and deliverance.—*Simeon*.

Ver. 57. A wonder explained by greater wonders. I. *An explanation of this wonder.* God doth draw near to men. 1. Men have ever been in the thoughts of God. 2. God came tenderly near in nature. 3. The Lord Jesus was specially near in the days of His life on earth. 4. He came still nearer to us in His death. 5. In heaven He is perpetually near us. 6. Jesus may well come near to His people, for there is a mystical union which ensures it. II. *Consider the wonder itself.* I. By no means is this wonder at all contrary to expectation. 2. God draws near by strengthening us to bear up under pressure. 3. By vouchsafing a doubly vivid sense of His love. 4. By granting a sensible assurance of His sympathy. 5. By speedy and remarkable deliverance out of trouble. 6. The text indicates surprise concerning the memorable graciousness of God. 7. The promptness of God. 8. The extreme tenderness of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon*.

Ver. 58. God pleading for saints and saints pleading for God. I. *The Divine pleading.* 1. The Lord pleads our cause in the court of Providence by silencing enemies and by raising up friends for His people. 2. He pleads for them in the court of Divine law. 3. In the court of conscience. 4. In the court of heaven. 5. And at the last great day of judgment. II. *If the Lord hath pleaded the causes of our soul, we should plead His cause while we have breath to pray.* 1. This is the life-work of the Christian. 2. Should be done in witnessing for Christ by our consistency of conduct. 3. We can all plead for Christ in a private way. Be it mine to weep for the sins of the time and prophesy against them. Be it yours in your own private walk and conversation to rebuke private sin, and by your loving earnestness to make Jesus Christ dear to many souls!—*C. H. Spurgeon*.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — Faithfulness in service. If you and I show that we attach importance to the solemn performance of even the slightest duty connected with our dear Master's service; that we consider even the office of doorkeeper in His house an office of honour; that, convinced of His presence, we are as devout in offering the prayers when only two or three are present as when there are two or three hundred—we shall find His blessing attending us, and we shall be the means of converting others.—*Dean Hook*.

—A carpenter was once asked, Why he troubled to finish off a certain magistrate's bench so carefully? His reply was, "I can't do otherwise; besides, I may have to sit on it one of these days."

Faithful to death. When Commodore Joseph Smith saw by the first despatch that reached Washington from Fortress Monroe that the *Congress*, on which his son was commander, had shown the white flag, he said, "Then Joe's dead." It was so.

Prayer an ever-open refuge. St. Cuthbert was once in a snowstorm that drove his boat on the coast of Fife. "The snowstorm closes the road along the shore," mourned his comrades; "the storm bars our way over the sea." "There is still the way of heaven; that lies open," said the devoted saint.

Divine aid works a marvellous change. Probably there is nowhere on the globe so marked a climatic boundary as that of the Cascade Mountains in both Washington Territory and Oregon. West of this boundary the winters are mild and the summers cool and showery; east of it the winters are sharp and dry and the summers very hot. On one side are gigantic firs and cedars, while on the other all are of poor size and condition. Even the flowers are of new species, and all the atmospheric conditions are changed. The line that lies between the unsaved and the saved, once crossed, what changes are manifest! "If any man be in Jesus Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; lo, all things have become new."

HOMILETICS.

A CONFIDENT APPEAL TO DIVINE JUSTICE.

(Verses 59-66.)

I. That Jehovah recognises the wrongs suffered by His servants. "O Lord, Thou has seen my wrong; judge Thou my cause" (ver. 59). It seemed at times as if the chosen people were forgotten and left to the mercy of their oppressors. Years passed away, and still there was no prospect of rescue. The valiant stand made by the prophet involved him in great and unjust suffering, and it seemed as if Heaven was indifferent to the issue. But things are not what they seem. All the time the eye of Jehovah was watching the struggle and noting every act of injustice and wrong. Every pang of suffering is faithfully registered. When the soul is conscious that Jehovah is cognisant of its distress, it is nerved with courage and patiently waits God's time of deliverance.

II. That Jehovah infallibly observes the cruel plottings and malicious reproaches of His people's enemies. "Thou hast seen all their vengeance. Thou hast heard their reproach, O Lord, and all their imaginations against me," &c. (vers. 60-63). Not a single movement, not a word of scorn of His enemies escapes the eye and the ear of Jehovah. How vain and foolish their opposition appears to Him! Their cleverest combinations are but the work of helpless imbecility; their wildest rage is but a momentary flash of aimless malignity. In a moment their schemes are shattered and their revilings for ever silenced. God is so strong in conscious righteousness that He can afford to bide His time. It is a mistake to regard His long-suffering patience as a sign of apathy.

III. That Jehovah will vindicate the wrongs of His servants by punishing their oppressors. "Render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands," &c. (vers. 64-66). The imprecatory form of these words are uttered by Jeremiah in his prophetic character. He calls for the vengeance upon his enemies which their iniquities have deserved, and which Divine Justice is certain to render. The versions and the Targum all render these verses not as imperatives, but as futures—*Thou shalt render unto them a recompense, &c.* It is an unalterable principle of the Divine government to punish all evil-doers. The sufferings they have inflicted on others shall be meted out to them with swift and terrible retribution. "Under the heavens of the Lord" there is no place of escape for the workers of iniquity. The wrongs of God's servants shall be redressed, and His honour and justice universally vindicated.

LESSONS.—1. *The Divine patience with evil-doers must not be construed as meaning indifference.* 2. *It is an aggravation of suffering when we know it is unjust.* 3. *Vengeance against all workers of iniquity may be safely left in the hands of God.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 59-63. **The Divine slowness to punish.** I. *Does not arise from indifference to human wrongs.* "Thou has seen my wrong" (ver. 59). II. *Is not from want of knowledge of all the actions of the wicked* (vers. 60-63). III. *Indicates that God is so strong and man is so weak.* IV. *Affords every opportunity for the exercise of mercy to the truly penitent.*

Ver. 63. **A godly life the music of society.** I. *Like music, a godly life is harmonious.* 1. It is in harmony

with God. A pure manhood is in harmony with all that is Godlike in thought and sentiment, and with all that is Christly in character and work. It is in harmony with the works of God, with all that is beautiful in nature. It is in harmony with the providence of God, with all that is happy or sad in the discipline of life; and supremely it is in harmony with the inspired truth of God as revealed in history, character, and precept. 2. It is in harmony with itself. All the truer sympathies of a

devout heart, all the higher faculties of a pure mind exist in a condition of self-harmony. Living in communion with the Supreme Being, the good man obtains true concord in the exercise of prayer. And thus attuned by devotion, every power of his soul joins in the hymn of life. 3. It is in harmony with the highest good of the race. A godly man is ever the foremost to aid any philanthropic enterprise for the real welfare of others. All the strongest impulses of his nature prompt him to sympathetic action for the unfortunate. Consequently his time, money, and influence are made subservient to the common good of men.

II. *Like music, a godly life is cheering.* When we have been oppressed with care, when the great mystery of life has come heavily upon our souls, what hope and comfort have been imparted by contact with a happy, pious spirit. III. *Like music, a godly life is inspiring.* When men would have given up the conflict of life in despair, how often has the word and life of a Christian filled them with new courage; and how frequently are careless souls awakened to a sense of duty by the moral earnestness of the godly around them. IV. *Like music, a godly life is calming.* What a quieting influence has the life of a good man upon those around him. His presence subdues anger; by his smile the deepest unrest is removed. He calms the passions of the unholy and soothes the sorrow of the troubled. V. *Are our lives morally musical?* Are they in harmony with God and all His works? Are our dispositions in the home, in business, and in the varied scenes of life kindly? If so, then are we the joy, the inspiration, and the quietude of many lives around us that might otherwise be sad, monotonous, and unpeaceful.—*The Lay Preacher.*

Vers. 64–66. **Divine punishment:** I. *Is proportioned to human sin.* “A recompense according to the work of their hands” (ver. 64). II. *Afflicts the chief instrument of human sin.* “Give them sorrow of heart” (ver. 65)—blindness of heart, obstinacy, hardness.

III. *Is an appalling reality.* “Persecute and destroy them in anger” (ver. 66).

Ver. 65. God can entangle the head that thinks itself clearest, and sink the heart that thinks itself stoutest.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—It is best always to do justly. Writing on the question of just treatment between the Southern and Northern States of America, and especially of the black race, G. W. Cable said: “But it is sometimes said, Will not this tend eventually to amalgamation? Idle question! Will it help the matter to withhold men’s manifest rights? What can we do better for the remotest future than to be just in the present, and leave the rest to the Divine Rewarder of nations that walk uprightly?”

Justice between man and man. The doctrine which bases all the relations of employer and employed upon self-interest is a doctrine of the pit; it has been bringing hell to earth in large instalments for a great many years. You can have hell in your factory, or you can have heaven there, just as you please. If it is hell that you want, build your business on the law of hell, which is—Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Out of that will come fightings perennial and unrelenting. If it is heaven that you want, then build your business on the law of the kingdom of heaven, which is—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. That will put you in the path of peace.

Religion and justice. In the year 813 the Doge Angelo Participazio took vigorous means for the enlargement of the small group of buildings which were to be the nucleus of the future Venice. For the offices of religion he built the church of St. Mark, and on or near the spot where the Ducal Palace now stands he built a palace for the administration of justice. Observe that piety towards God and justice towards man have been at least the nominal purposes of every act and institution of ancient Venice.—*Ruskin.*

Wrong-doing brings its own retribution. Cosimo I., of Florence, was a ferocious, cruel tyrant, murdering his

own son in the presence of his mother. After a few years he married a wicked but beautiful woman, who had been a former partner in sin with him, and in his last days, broken with decrepitude, was helpless in her despotic hands. For two years after the palsy had deprived him of speech or movement, he lay dying, bereft of everything but a torturing memory of his cruelty and wickedness.

— The Jews have a tradition that Cain was doomed to carry Abel's corpse for a hundred years.

The just and the unjust. Such being our unjust man, let us place by his side a man of true simplicity and nobleness, resolved, as Æschylus says, not to seem, but to be good. We must certainly take away the seeming; for if he be thought to be a just man, he will have honours and gifts on the strength of this reputation, so that it will be uncertain whether it is for justice's sake or for the sake of the gifts and honours that he is what he is. Yes, we must strip him bare of everything but justice, and make his case the reverse of the former. Without being guilty of one unjust act, let him have the worst reputation for injustice, so that his virtue may be thoroughly tested and shown to be proof against infamy and all its consequences; and let him go on to the day of his death steadfast in his justice, but with a life-

long reputation for injustice. They who prefer injustice above justice will say that in such a situation the just man will be scourged, racked, fettered, will have his eyes burnt out, and at last, after suffering every kind of torture, will be crucified; and thus learn that it is best to resolve, not to be, but to seem just.—*Plato's Republic.*

Injustice not to be hastily resented. When Aristides, the Athenian general, sat to arbitrate a difference between two persons, one of them said, "This fellow accused thee at such a time." To whom Aristides answered, "I sit not to hear what he has done against me, but against thee." That was a noble reply of Philip the Good when urged by his courtiers to punish a prelate who had done him great injustice, he declined, saying, "It is a fine thing to have revenge in one's power; but it is a finer thing not to use it."

God frustrates the schemes of the wicked. All the plots and contrivances of wicked men, all their turning of things upside down, are treated as the potter's clay; for when they think they have brought all to maturity, ripeness, and perfection, when they look upon their business as good as done, on a sudden all their labour is lost; for God, who stands by all the while and looks on, will, with one small touch, with the least breath of His mouth, blast and break all in pieces.—*Edlin.*

CHAPTER IV.

ZION'S PITIFUL ESTATE.

THE first half of this chapter is occupied with details connected with the ruthless overthrow and harrowing incidents in the conquest of Jerusalem. Distinct and vigorous expression is thereafter given to the intense conviction that the terrific disasters were traceable to the iniquities of the people, and especially of the ruling classes. They suffered from the anger of the Lord; but He would not contend for ever. There is hope that, after meting out justice to oppressors, He would *arise and have mercy upon Zion, for the time to favour her: yea, the set time had come*. The shadows of the night were very dense, but streaks across them betoken to the spiritual eye that day is breaking, the day of restoration.

(N) Ver. 1. *How is the gold dimmed*. Not a mere diminution of its brightness, but a tarnishing which lowered the estimate of the ore. *The most pure gold changed*; something more than an alteration in the appearance of the purified metal is observed. The alteration is not in its substance, but in its depreciated value. *The stones of the sanctuary*—not only were precious stones worn on the garments of the High Priest, but the Temple also *was garnished for beauty with them—are poured out at the head of every street*. If this is regarded as having reference to the costly stones of the House of the Lord, the objection naturally arises that no enemy would be so reckless as to strew such precious material all over the city. Rather the whole verse is to be considered as a figurative representation of the sad lot of Jerusalem, not of its buildings but of its inhabitants, which will be told of in some verses following. A similar comparison is made by the prophet Zechariah, who foretells that *the sons of Zion shall be as the stones of a crown*, only not cast down, as here, but *lifted on high* (Zech. ix. 16).

(2.) Ver. 2 defines the objects of which the preceding verse was an illustration. *The precious sons of Zion*, grouping all the people together, *a kingdom of priests, an holy nation*, comparable to, weighed in one scale against *fine gold* in the other, he is astonished to see as in utter contrast with what they were. Three varieties of gold are mentioned—gold, pure gold, fine gold—as if the sons of Zion were precious beyond the most precious things; but the contrast between the high estimate and the degraded reality, between what the Lord formed them to be and foes had reduced them to, forces out the cry, *How are they reckoned as earthen pitchers*, made from ignoble materials by human hands, and easily broken to pieces (Jer. xix. 11).

Their humiliating condition is evidenced in children, adults, nobles, and mothers.

(3.) Ver. 3. Beasts of prey show affection for their brood. *Even the jackals draw out—present—the breast*; a familiar fact, testifying that they were true to their instincts, *they suckle their whelps*; but in miserable contrariety to this, the daughter of my people has become otherwise; unwilling to give nourishment to their babes, they show themselves cruel, like ostriches in the desert. This arraignment of the wild birds is according to ideas current at the time, and reported in the Book of Job. *She leaveth her eggs on the earth . . . she is hardened against her young ones, as if they were not hers* (chap. xxxix. 14, 16). Later observations require some modification of this account of the habits of the ostrich; but the writers of the Sacred Scriptures had not a knowledge of Nature beyond their times.

This fearful, unnatural result of the extreme trials of the Israelites had its correlated feature.

(7.) Ver. 4. *The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth*, because of getting no milk. *The young children ask bread, and no one divides to them the cakes* in which form it was made.

(7.) Ver. 5. Adults also are distressed. *They that did feed delicately*, in the fastidiousness of luxury, *are desolate in the streets*, with no one to serve them, with no means to satisfy hunger, perishing. *They that were brought up in scarlet*, those of the wealthy classes, accustomed to use the most expensive cloth, lay themselves, in sheer despair, on the dirt-heaps which have accumulated in the ruined city. Like Dives, *clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day*, they too are in darkness—only they in the visible, he in the invisible world.

(1) Ver. 6. Those awful distresses were due to the way in which the people had lived. The crying wickedness of Sodom is again and again denounced by prophets as a warning to the Israelites. Here that wickedness is minified, and, from the long drawn out sufferings of the latter, it is implied that the *iniquity*—not the *punishment* of the iniquity, a translation which has not been established from the usage of the two corresponding Hebrew words elsewhere—of *the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom*. The Cities of the Plain had not the *advantage* which the Jews had, who were *intrusted with the oracles of God*, and their guilt was less. The supreme authority of Jesus Christ stands behind the declaration that it would be *more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment* than for those who refused the light of life. Moreover, Sodom was destroyed by a sudden stroke—no protracted sufferings, no starved, wailing children, no mothers eating their own infants, *overthrown as in a moment*, and by forces in which no human agency had any part; hands did not encircle her. No enemies brandished their swords against her inhabitants, investing her on every side. God can paralyse all industries and destroy a community without man's aid. The ground of this

preference of Sodom is that a trouble direct from God is more bearable than one inflicted by man, and was expressed by King David, *Let me fall into the hand of Jehovah . . . let me not fall into the hand of man* (1 Chron. xxi. 13).

(γ) Ver. 7. Men under religious vows could not have been so numerous as to form a conspicuous element in the population. Nor is there any reason to suppose that they were noted for a fine physique. Besides, the Hebrew word is not confined to those who are professed Nazarites, but applies to such as were distinguished from others. So Joseph, in Jacob's dying forecasts, is described as *him that was nazir, separate from* [margin, *that is prince among*] *his brethren* (Gen. xlix. 26). Her nobles were purer than snow, &c. Still another feature characterised them, they were more ruddy in body than rubies. "The white and red are to be understood as mixed, and shading into one another, as our popular poetry speaks of cheeks which 'like milk and purple shine'" (Delitzsch); *My beloved is white and ruddy* (Cant. v. 10); "My love is like the red, red rose" (Scottish song). *Sapphire was their polishing* [lit. figure]. The comparison, however, can only be with the brilliancy of the gem, not with its shape. The appearance of the nobles, as here described, indicates that their faces were not bronzed and seamed by exposure to all kinds of weather; no engrained dust from toiling day after day darkened their complexion. They looked as those who *live delicately in king's courts*. But now—

(η) Ver. 8. Darker than blackness is their visage; they are not recognised in the streets as members of the aristocracy; nothing marks them off from the labouring classes. Their skin cleaveth to their bones, they are emaciated and shrivelled through hunger and anguish, and the skin is become dry as wood.

(θ) Ver. 9. One melancholy contrast suggests another, *i.e.*, between those who are dead and those who are tortured by want. Better are the slain by the sword than the slain by hunger. The next clause is more descriptive of the condition of the former than of the latter. The advantage of less prolonged and gnawing pains is with those who pine away [lit. flow away, as sinking from loss of blood gushing from ghastly wounds], pierced through at a time when there was no lack of food from the fruits of the field.

(ι) Ver. 10. A more dreadful fact is related in regard to the little ones than that in vers. 3 and 4. The hands of tender-hearted women—not servants or hirelings, but themselves—have boiled their own children; they became meat for them in that climax of sufferings, the destruction of the daughter of my people. Moral duty is sacrificed, and unnatural crimes committed at the shrine of physical cravings.

(κ) Ver. 11 is a conclusion from the immediately preceding verses, as ver. 6 is from those preceding it. *Jehovah has accomplished, i.e.*, has put forth a full measure of, *His fury*; has poured out the fierceness of His anger, and one method of its action is *He has kindled a fire in Zion, and has devoured her foundations*. The scenes of horror which have been depicted show the meeting-place of Zion's guilt and its Divine punisher. God's fierce wrath is the blast which consumes flagrant iniquities. The entire demolition of the former principles dominating the Israelites is thus symbolised, and so signifies that room is made for the new spirit which shall possess the restored captivity when they lay again the foundations of the House of the Lord.

A change of features is to be presented now by sketching, not so much the disasters on classes of the people, as the causes by which they were produced, and the baffled hopes ensuing.

(λ) Ver. 12. The kings of the earth—men who might be considered experts—believed not, neither all the inhabitants of the world—men who were moved by appearances and common hearsay—that an adversary . . . should enter into the gates of Jerusalem. This belief cannot be merely "a deep subjective conviction." Whether or not the city was previously taken is a matter of no importance. What is stated is a general opinion. The unverified belief would be grounded on the knowledge of the strong situation and careful fortifications of Jerusalem, which, with the means of siege then at command, might be considered almost impossible of capture. It was invested a year and a half before capture by the greatest warrior of the age. Besides this, there may well have been, since the remarkable repulse of Sennacherib, a wide-spread supposition, as when the tribes emerged from the desert, that the God of Israel was very mighty in the defence of His worshippers, and would not let His sacred city be subjugated.

(μ) Ver. 13. It is needful to connect this verse with the last by words like, *This incredible thing came to pass, because of the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests*—the position which these two classes assumed in the polity of Jerusalem is indicated in various strong terms by Jeremiah, the prophet of this period, and especially in his references to the treatment which he himself received at their hands (chap. xxvi.)—*who shed in her midst the blood of the righteous*. They are branded as instigators and leaders of the evil, and, like other occupiers of usurped power, their jealousy and anger at those who crossed them in any way urge them to the extreme measure of dooming to death the faithful witnesses for God. In thus declaring the causes of the calamity to Judah, there is once more uplifted the moral standard which has made the Bible to be the impulse to all ethical revivals, the rebuker of wrong by whomsoever committed, the unswerving assertor of the rights of God in the face of man's injury to man.

(ν) Vers. 14 and 15 seem applicable to the condition of prophets and priests after the city

had been taken. They were panicstricken. They staggered [as] blind men in the streets; an effect accounted for in other parts of Scripture as a punishment of sin. *They make haste to shed innocent blood . . . therefore we grope for the wall like the blind, yea, we grope as they that have no eyes* (Isa. lix. 7 and 10). Their sin found them out; its marks were palpable; they were defiled with blood when the command to go into exile arrested them. So they were avoided; [men] could not touch their garments. In their blood-stained aspect they were met with the shout which was enjoined upon leprous persons. That it was the leper who was to cry *unclean* is of little consequence where "poetical license" is exercised. *Away unclean one [men], cried to them, away, away;* and so such as had, in spiritual pride, said, *Come not near me, I am holier than thou*, are abhorred by the people they contemned. The just judgment of God was manifest, so that, as proscribed offenders, *When they fled away and staggered blindly as before in the city, they found that, even in other places where they sought ease and rest for the soles of their feet, the natives would not allow them to stay; [men] said among the nations, They shall no longer sojourn [among us].* These references, in all probability, are made to real occurrences.

(D) Ver. 16. The circumstances of those fugitives are ascribable to Jehovah. Wherever they went, the face of Jehovah had not disappeared; in anger, not in grace, lifted up upon them, it has scattered them, and will no more regard them. This fact was verified on their treatment by the peoples to whom they had gone. There no respect was paid, no favour shown, on account of office, occupation, or age.

(Y) Ver. 17 refers to the persons remaining in the city, who, notwithstanding that God's righteous judgments had so afflicted prophets and priests, yet thought longingly of human defences; *Still our eyes failed [looking] for vain help.* This is explained in the succeeding clause, *We eagerly watched for a nation that could not save, trusting that Egypt, that broken reed, or perhaps some other equally unsatisfactory auxiliary, would appear to rescue them.*

(S) Ver. 18. Whatever their expectations might be, they were under constant pressure from the besieging army. *They hunted our steps;* every movement was closely watched, so that *we could not go in our streets, there, liable to be laid hold on at every turn, all seemed to be over.* The final cessation of their independence was but the question of an hour, *our end is come, our national life extinguished.*

(P) Ver. 19. Flight from the city was of no benefit. Fugitives were promptly and hotly followed, whether they betook themselves to the cavernous retreats of the *everlasting hills*, or to waste and lonely places. *Swifter were our pursuers than the eagles of heaven; on the mountains they chased us, in the desert they laid wait for us.* So the deportation to Babylon is prepared for, and proof given of the complete break-up of the organised community of Israel.

(7) Ver. 20. The crowning evidence of the collapse was the seizure of the head of the State, who is considered to have been, not King Josiah but Zedekiah, by most commentators. *The breath of our nostrils, the token of our life, is the monarch.* An idea like this was prevalent among ancient peoples, and a noticeable confirmation of it is quoted from Seneca, *De Clementia*: "He (the sovereign) is the vital breath which so many thousands (of citizens) draw." In his life the nation views the representative of its life. "God made David king, and his posterity, for this end that the life of the people might, in a manner, reside in him;" and so long as he was among them, there seemed to be a pledge of the favour of God, and so of their continued existence as a separated nation. Zedekiah might be irresolute and weak, but it is not personal character, it is office which is regarded—the anointed of Jehovah. "We must observe that these high terms properly belong to Christ only, for David was not the life of the people except as he was a type of and represented His person . . . and hence we learn that the Church is dead when separated from its Head" (Calvin). The representative of this earthly life of the nation had disappeared, *was taken, "like a wild animal driven into a pitfall," in their pits.* His capture by the hostile forces is related in Jer. lii. 7-11, and was achieved about a month prior to the sack of Jerusalem. It was the prelude to the conviction that their last hopes were being crushed. *Of whom we said, Under his shadow we will live among the nations.* As a captive to Babylon, there was not the ghost of a chance to rally round him, and no sort of prospect of existing as a semi-independent people in any foreign land. *The end had come.*

(W) Ver. 21. *The children of Edom* had exulted over the destruction of Jerusalem, and urgently called for its completeness. They said, *Raise it, raise it, even to the foundations thereof* (Ps. cxxxvii. 7). Now they are addressed in bitter irony, *Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom, take a full measure of your malicious joy, but with all that your triumphing will be short; you cannot escape pungent woes, however extended your territory may be, that dwellest in the land of Uz, a district of country bordering on Edom's land, and which seems to have been overrun by Edomites. To thee also shall the cup pass, the cup of the wine of the wrath of God which is mingled in His anger.*

The strong feelings of indignation, which were almost hereditary among the Israelites, against the Edomites, may be partly accounted for from the idea that variance with one's own kith and kin is often expressed by more bitter terms than variance with strangers, and partly by the consciousness which Israel had of its spiritual calling which the "profane" nature of Esau's descendants tended to render inoperative.

(N) Ver. 22. No hint marks the transition from the grim scenes of calamity in which the

Jews had been involved to this glimpse of light and renewal. The abruptness must be due to the conviction that, as Israel is the people with whom Jehovah has entered into covenant, all cannot be over with them, however they are pressed down by adversity. If they forsake Him, they will be chastised till they acknowledge and repent of their apostasy. Then He will have pity for His name's sake. Punishment will come to a termination; **Ended is thine iniquity, daughter of Zion.** The consequences following an evil procedure would, as it were, drain to the dregs the cup of wrath and grace would begin to appear. "A Messianic hope" is created, **He will no more carry thee into captivity**, by the Chaldeans, at any rate. This promise is dependent for its fulfilment upon the righteous state of Israel. Avoiding the sins which had brought the present term of punishment, they would not be subjected to such punishment again. The exiles who returned from Babylon were greatly purified and elevated by the trials which had been passed through, and if there had been due progress in spiritual things, as the prophet Malachi declares there was not, no further casting out of the land of promise would have taken place. *But they crucified the Lord of glory. Their house is left unto them desolate, and they are scattered over the earth till they turn again to the Lord.* The allotment to Edom is a contrast; **He visits thine iniquities, daughter of Edom; He discovers thy sins.** He sees they are persisted in, and shame and woe follow the exposure. "God covers sin when He forgives it (Ps. xxxii. 1-5). He discovers or reveals it when He punishes it" (Job xx. 27). The safety of God's people connotes the destruction of His enemies (Rev. xxix. and xx.).

HOMILETICS.

MORAL DEGRADATION.

(Verses 1, 2.)

The destruction of Jerusalem was an event so unexpected, so unparalleled, so astounding, that it seemed as if it could not be sufficiently lamented. The grief of the prophet is not yet exhausted. Once more he looks upon the fated city as it gradually but inevitably collapses in the tightening grasp of the relentless besiegers, and as he sees the miseries of his countrymen in their direful extremity, he renews his doleful elegy. He reiterates the doctrine that the sufferings of Judah are the just punishment of her sins, and not until the chastisement has had its proper effect is there any hope of her restoration. These verses describe the moral degradation and wretchedness of the sufferers, and suggest the following reflections.

I. **That moral degradation is the more evident when compared with a former condition of superior excellence.** The people of God are called "the precious sons of Zion," and their moral excellence is compared to "the most fine gold," and to the hallowed "stones of the sanctuary." Judah was a chosen and consecrated nation, and enjoyed unexampled privileges. She was raised not only into temporal affluence and splendour, but was intended to represent the lofty type of a moral and spiritual commonwealth. She was the custodian and teacher of spiritual blessings that were to enrich the world. She was the medium through which Jehovah sought to express His gracious purpose of salvation to the whole human race. No nation had been so exalted and so honoured. While she remained faithful to her calling, Judah was supreme and invulnerable among the nations. She shone with the lustre of the most fine gold, and her position was as secure as that of an impregnable fortress. But when she sinned she fell, and her fall was the more notable when contrasted with her former greatness and grandeur.

II. **That moral degradation is a loss of character and stability.** The moral reputation of Judah was tarnished—the gold was dimmed, the most fine gold changed. Three kinds of gold are mentioned in these verses—gold, most fine gold, and fine (or *solid*) gold. The precious metal not only lost its brilliancy but also its massiveness: it became thin and hollow. The religious character of God's people, which was compact and strong as the solid building of the sanctuary, is shattered, and lies in a heap of ruins, like the stones of the demolished Temple

that now block the streets of Jerusalem. Its moral value is destroyed. It is now of no more worth than a piece of brittle earthenware, which the swift hands of the potter can easily put together and as easily break. Sin is a great disintegrator of character. The external form may appear unchanged long after decay has set in; but the mischief is slowly and surely working, and the final collapse is inevitable. Nothing is safe where righteousness is ignored, whether in individuals or in nations.

III. That moral degradation is the occasion of painful lamentation. "How is the gold become dim! How is the most fine gold changed! How are they esteemed as earthen pitchers" (vers. 1, 2). Even the most callous are sometimes moved to pity as they witness the downfall of excellence which they often envied and could not reach. Misfortune softens the hard-hearted. But who can sound the depths of anguish of the soul that realises the greatness of the disaster occasioned by the fall of morality and religion! It is the loss of personal righteousness, happiness, and peace; the loss of national prestige; the loss of all the safeguards of social life; the loss of untold blessing to the world; and, greatest of all, the loss of the favour and smile of God! In the midst of moral wreckage and ruin, it is a hopeful sign when even one is left who sincerely mourns and laments the catastrophe. The tears of such an one shine with the lustre of the goodness whose loss he deploras.

LESSONS.—1. *Religion only can make a nation truly illustrious.* 2. *When religion declines, the glory of the nation is obscured.* 3. *The loss of religion should be not only lamented, but should lead to diligent search after its recovery.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 1, 2. **Moral character:** I. Is the basis of individual worth. II. Gives reputation and stability to individual life. III. Needs to be carefully guarded.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Lack of moral sense. It is no exaggeration to assert that Napoleon I., strangely called the Great, had no moral sense. Carlyle tells the story of a German emperor who, when corrected for a mistake he made in Latin, replied, "I am King of the Romans, and above grammar." Napoleon's arrogance was infinitely greater. He thought himself above morality, and really seems to have believed that he had a perfect right to commit any crime, political or personal, that would advance his interests by an iota; and indeed he did commit so many it is almost impossible to recount them.

Moral degradation affects work. The corrupted Papacy of the fifteenth century so injuriously affected the art world, that from that time there was a serious decline in all the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. The degradation of religion first touched public morality, and then spread to all

the arts. Character tells on skill. Where the heart declines, the hand will soon disclose it. The "work of our hands" is only established as "the beauty of the Lord is upon us."—*Ruskin.*

Degeneration. In the Central Park Museum, at New York, there is the skeleton of a huge bird, now extinct. It is 14 feet in height; and by its side is a stuffed specimen of another bird not more than 14 inches. The latter is the nearest living representative of the former, which once abounded in New Zealand.

Degeneration of character. Rarely does a successful merchant who comes to New Orleans as a young man from the cooler latitudes leave a son who inherits the father's energy. One generation is enough to change character. A city that lies below the level of the river which washes its wharves, and only a few feet above the poisonous swamps surrounding it, and which has six sweltering summer months, must always continue to draw upon the north for new men to carry on its larger business activities.—*Smalley.*

Moral degradation of drink. It is

in the spiritual realm that the ravages of strong drink are most terrible. Many a mother observes, with a heart that grows heavier day by day, the signs of moral decay in the character of her son. It is not the flushed face and heavy eyes that trouble her the most; it is the evidence that his mind is becoming duller and fouler, his sensibilities less acute, his sense of honour less commanding. She discovers that his loyalty to truth is somewhat impaired, that he deceives her frequently without compunction. Coupled with this loss of truthfulness is the weakening of the will, which always accompanies chronic alcoholism. Then comes the loss of self-respect, the lowering of ambition, and the fading out of hope. It is a mournful spectacle—that of the brave, the ingenuous, high-spirited man sinking steadily down to the degradation of inebriety; but how many such spectacles are visible all over the land!

A good character a blessing. When Peter Cooper, the New York Philan-

thropist, held a reception at the Women's Art School shortly before his death, a most impressive testimony was given of the high regard in which his character was held. It was interesting to note the various manners of the crowd who approached him. "Mr. Cooper, we must put our little boy's hand in yours," said a young couple, with a child five or six years old at their side. Then a group of boys would come along and stand curiously regarding him from a short distance. "That's Mr. Cooper," they whispered in an undertone. And so the evening wore away, and ten thousand people had come and gone through the great bright halls and schoolrooms, and Mr. Cooper's presence had put a good thought or feeling into everybody's heart. I can see him now, with his smiling face and interested look, and his soft white hair waving over his shoulders, amid flowers, lights, and cheerful music, whilst his presence brooded like a benediction over the swaying and surging crowd.

HOMILETICS.

THE EXTREMITY OF SUFFERING.

(Verses 3-10.)

I. **Deadens natural affection** (vers. 3, 4). Maternal instincts are demoralised in the straitness of the siege. Little children are left to perish, without any effort to relieve their wants or soothe their sufferings. In vain they ask for bread; no attempt is made to allay their hunger and thirst. Absorbed in their own intolerable miseries, the wretched mothers sink below the instincts of the wild beasts, for even the jackals suckle their young. They are become like the cruel crocodile, which, after laying its eggs in the sand, abandons them without further care. The infants pine to death, unheeded and unmourned. Excessive suffering denaturalises man and woman.

II. **Drags down all classes to one level** (ver. 5). The wealthy are now even as the poor. They who fared sumptuously, and whose tastes were pampered with the most delicate viands, are now sullenly starving to death with the crowd. They who were clothed in scarlet, and accustomed to every refinement from their infancy, are now content to stretch themselves on the dirt-heaps of the city, and eager to devour any offal they may pick up amid the general scramble for food. All men find a universal communism in suffering. Human extremity knows no distinction in ranks and titles. Hunger drags every one to the same level.

III. **Prefers a swift to a lingering punishment** (ver. 6). The destruction of Sodom, which filled a large space in the Jewish mind as an example of the terrible judgment of Heaven on extreme iniquity, was regarded as light compared with the sufferings of Jerusalem. The punishment of Sodom was sudden, and came direct from God; but the punishment of Judah was by the hands of the

Chaldeans, and was slow and lingering. David preferred to be dealt with directly from God, and chose pestilence rather than injuries inflicted by human hands (2 Sam. xxiv. 14). But the iniquity of Judah was greater than the sin of Sodom, and the punishment was therefore more severe. There is a point in suffering when we yearn for a speedy release; when death is welcome.

IV. **Reduces the healthiest from beauty to hideousness** (vers. 7, 8). The Nazarites, because of their temperance, were remarkable for health and personal beauty, and were held in veneration because of their religious devotion (comp. Num. vi.). Their complexion was ruddy as coral, and the beauty of their physical form was as exact and faultless as is the cutting of a sapphire. But the most distinguished of the population, whether Nazarites or of the aristocracy, are involved in the general calamity, and suffer with the rest. Their rosebud complexion is turned to blackness, their frame is shrunk and distorted, and their skin is shrivelled and dry. Famine plays havoc with beauty, and brings the strongest down to helplessness.

V. **Recoils not from the most horrible means of appeasing the irresistible pangs of hunger** (vers. 9, 10). Such were the sufferings of the famished, that they who were slain with the sword were deemed happier than those who were pierced with the dart of unappeased hunger. So extreme was the famine, that cannibalism became common, and women who were known as tender-hearted mothers actually boiled and ate their own children (comp. 2 Kings vi. 28, 29; Lev. xxvi. 29; Deut. xxviii. 56, 57; Josephus's "Wars," cap. x. 9). It is a fearful experience when the animal in human nature gains the mastery over every other instinct.

LESSONS.—1. *Extremity makes strange revelations of human nature.* 2. *The restraints of civilisation are very superficial.* 3. *Sin acquaints the soul with the lowest depths of degradation.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 3-10. **The rigour of war.**

I. Demoralises maternal affection (ver. 1). II. Involves innocent children in suffering (ver. 2). III. Reduces all classes to poverty and distress (vers. 5, 7, 8). IV. Prolongs the misery of its victims (ver. 6). V. Is attended with the worst results of famine (vers. 9, 10).

Ver. 6. **Graduated punishment.** I. Is proportioned to the character and degree of the sin committed. II. Its severity implies the enormity of the offence. III. Cannot be charged with injustice.

Vers. 7-10. **The horrors of famine.**

I. Changes strength into feebleness and beauty into deformity (vers. 7, 8). II. Is more cruel than the sword (ver. 9). III. Debases the most refined into cannibals (v. 10).

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Degradation.** Is it not wonderful that base desires should so extinguish in men the sense of their own excellency, as to make them willing that their souls should be like to the

souls of beasts, mortal and corruptible with their bodies?—*Hooker.*

There have been those—

"Who, in the dark dissolving human heart,
And hallowed secrets of this microcosm,
Dabbling, with shameless jest, a shameful
band,
Encarnalised their spirits."

Importance of food. Temperature has less influence in inciting the migration of birds than failure of food; for a few even of the regular migrants will linger throughout the winter at sheltered localities, where food remains accessible, safely daring the severest cold. Hunger means loss of heat and life, and it is this the birds primarily flee. No attraction to Christians like spiritual food. "Tie them up by the teeth," as Mr. Spurgeon says.

Necessity a teacher. "Life and the necessities of life are the best philosophers, if we will only listen honestly to what they say to us; and dislike the lesson as we may, it is cowardice which refuses to hear it."—*Froude.*

— The wife of a certain chieftain who had fallen upon idle habits, one day lifted the dish-cover at dinner, and revealed a pair of spurs; a sign that he must ride and hunt for his next meal.

Help in extremity. In the Magdalen Islands, off the Newfoundland coast, the means of livelihood is almost entirely found in the fisheries, and if these fail, life becomes a burden. In 1883 a famine occurred which came near to decimating the population. The fisheries failed; the ship which was expected to bring the winter's supply before the ice formed foundered in a storm. By the time spring came, starvation stared the people in the face.

Many must have died had not a large ship filled with produce been wrecked off Coffin Island. The news spread like wildfire. The population turned out, and from the cargo of a shipwrecked vessel drew a new lease of life.

Man's extremity is God's opportunity. It is a current saying, "That the darkest cloud precedes the dawn," and that "Every dark cloud has a silver lining." Early risers tell us that the lowest temperature immediately precedes the sun-rising. These things serve to illustrate God's kingdom of grace. "Before honour is humility." "Thou has lifted me up and cast me down." "How long, O Lord, how long?"

HOMILETICS.

THE DESTRUCTION OF ZION.

(Verses 11, 12.)

I. Was thorough and complete. "The Lord kindled a fire in Zion, and it devoured the foundations thereof" (ver. 11). The holy city, the pride of the Jews and the envy of their enemies, was utterly overthrown. Not only were its walls, towers, palaces, and Temple demolished, but its very foundations were dug up and scattered: one stone was not left upon another. It was degraded and spurned by the resolute destroyers as a heap of useless rubbish. It was impossible for the rage of man to make a more complete ruin. In the intention of the irate Chaldeans it was destroyed for ever. And yet the Divine Guardian of the holy city allowed all this!

II. Was undeniable evidence of the reality of the Divine anger. "The Lord hath accomplished His fury: He hath poured out His fierce anger" (ver. 11). There was more of the righteous anger of Jehovah against the obstinate sin of His people in the destruction of Jerusalem, than there were skill and ferocity in the Chaldean army. The enemy would have been powerless to pierce the city bulwarks if the people had remained true to Jehovah, and sheltered themselves in humble trust beneath His all-powerful defence. But the wrath of God was provoked beyond the limit of further endurance, and the Chaldeans were used as the instruments of His vengeance. Surely the eyes of the suffering people were at last opened to see in the utter destruction of their beloved city that Jehovah was indeed angry with them.

III. Was a result deemed incredible by the nations. "The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem" (ver. 12). Jerusalem was so strongly fortified, not only by massive walls and bulwarks, but by the strength and heroism of its inhabitants, that it was deemed impregnable to all warlike forces of that day. Moreover, it was regarded as the dwelling-place of the Great King, who had hitherto baffled all attempts to capture it. The recent defeat of Sennacherib, one of the greatest warriors of the age, was fresh in the memory of the people. The belief gained general currency that the city could not be taken. It was invested for a year and a half by the Chaldean forces, furnished with the most powerful engines of assault, before it was actually

captured. Its fall was the amazement of the world. What was believed impossible had come to pass. Others saw, what the Jews were slow to acknowledge, that their God had deserted them and given them up to the destroyer.

LESSONS.—1. *The holiest place may be polluted by sin.* 2. *Persistent sin provokes Divine vengeance.* 3. *Divine wrath is not poured out till every opportunity is given for repentance.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 11. **The Divine anger.** 1. Will accomplish all it threatens. 2. Is terrible in its active manifestation. 3. May well be dreaded by the impenitent.

Ver. 12. **A world's wonder.** 1. That a divinely guarded city should fall. 2. That it should fall by the hands of the godless. 3. That some great sin must have been committed to make such a catastrophe possible.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Terrible destruction.** One of the officers at Fredericksburg says:—"Howard, who was with me, says I exclaimed, 'Oh, great God, see how our men, our poor fellows, are falling!' I remember that the whole plain was covered with men prostrate and falling. I had never before seen fighting like that—nothing approaching it in terrible uproar and destruction. As they charged, the artillery fire would break up their formation, and they would get mixed; then they would close up, go forward, receive the withering infantry fire, and those who were able would run to their houses and do all they could; then the next brigade coming up in succession would do their duty, and melt. It was like the snow coming down and melting on warm ground."

Concentration of power destroys.

In the eighteenth century an immense burning-glass was constructed in France, in which all the heat falling on a great lens was then concentrated on a smaller one, till at the focus such was the heat that iron, gold, and other metals ran like melted butter. Another one, made in England by Parker, fused the most refractory substances, and diamonds were by it reduced to vapour.

The Divine sovereignty. "God is free because no causes external to Himself have power over Him; and as good men are most free when most a law to themselves, so it is no infringement on God's freedom to say that He must have acted as He acted; but rather He is absolutely free because absolutely a law Himself to Himself."—*Froude.*

The curse of sin. It is the Trojan horse; it hath sword and famine and pestilence in the belly of it. Sin is a coal that not only blacks, but burns. Sin creates all our troubles; it puts gravel in our bread, wormwood in our cup. Sin rots the name, consumes the estates, buries relations. Sin shoots the flying roll of God's curses into a family and kingdom (Zech. v. 4). It is reported of Phocas, having built a wall of mighty strength about his city, there was a voice heard, "Sin is in the city, and that will throw down the wall."

HOMILETICS.

UNFAITHFUL RELIGIOUS LEADERS.

(Verses 13–16.)

I. **Ignore the sacred duties of their high office.** "The sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests" (ver. 13). The leaders, whose first duty it was to explain and enforce the Word of God, were the prime movers in the attempt to silence that Word. Their utter dereliction of duty, and the bitter rancour with which they were actuated, were evident in their repeated efforts to put Jeremiah to

death, the only man who had the courage to lift up his voice for Jehovah amid the general defection. Had they rallied round the faithful prophet and round their king, who was more weak than vicious, they might have saved the city and the nation from ruin. When the servants of the Lord and the religious guides of the people are false to their sacred vows, the nation is grievously misled, and disaster will follow.

II. Become intoxicated with slaughter. "That have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her; they have wandered (*reeled*) as blind men in the streets; they have polluted themselves with blood" (ver. 13, 14). They have lost the art of persuasion, even to do wrong, and, like all baffled tyrants, adopt the bloody policy of the sword. The people are coerced into rebellion against God and their best interests by brute force. Having once tasted blood, they revel in it, and reel through the city blinded by their insatiable lust of slaughter. They who ought to be holy, as God's ministers consecrated to His service, are defiled with blood, and that the blood not of enemies, but of their own countrymen. There is no fury so maddening and ungovernable as the thirst for blood.

III. Are shunned and abhorred by God and man (vers. 15, 16). They are denounced by the people they had oppressed, and hounded out of the city only to find themselves abhorred by the heathen to whom they fled for shelter. They were hated at home and abroad. "The anger of the Lord divided them," scattered them, and wherever they wandered, the people despised and shunned them. They were outcasts of God and men. They had sown to the wind, and they reaped the whirlwind. Such is the fate of the faithless and cruel. There is no punishment too severe for unfaithful ministers of God's Word.

LESSONS.—1. *False teachers are the curse of any community.* 2. *They are utterly reckless both as to what they say and do.* 3. *They involve the people in much suffering.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 13-16. False ministers of God. 1. Are the authors of the vilest sins (ver. 13). 2. Are capable of the most revolting cruelty in accomplishing their wicked ends (vers. 13, 14). 3. Are the execration of the people they oppress (ver. 15). 4. Are divinely punished (ver. 16).

Vers. 15, 16. The tactics of the wicked. 1. Recoil upon themselves. 2. Render them the abhorrence of all classes. 3. Are defeated and punished by the vengeance of Heaven.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — Unqualified ministers. It is the great wide-spread evil of the Church that it has unrenowned and inexperienced pastors; that so many become preachers before they become Christians, and are consecrated as priests at the altar of God before they are made holy to Christ by the offering of the heart to Him; and thus they worship an unknown God and proclaim an unknown Christ, and pray through

an unknown Spirit, and preach a state of holiness and fellowship with Christ, and a glory and a blessedness which are wholly unknown to them, and perhaps will remain unknown through all eternity. He must indeed be a heartless preacher who has not himself in his own heart the Christ and the grace that he declares. Alas! that all scholars in our universities might well ponder this. —*Baxter*.

Unbelief and ministerial inefficiency. There are dangerous signs at the present day of a relaxation of moral tone in the literature of free-thinking. There is a tendency to palliate the offences of vicious characters and to treat every sin as atoned for by intellectual brilliancy. But it would be in the highest degree unjust to throw the whole blame of his error upon every individual who may happen to be the victim of unbelief. We are all bound up together in this matter; and the sins, the unfaithfulness, the lack of

moral energy among Christians themselves contribute, to a great extent, to weaken the testimony to our faith. The ministers of God's Word must bear their share in this responsibility. So far as they fail to exhibit the moral truth and spiritual force of that Word, so far as they harden it, or obscure it, or misrepresent it, they contribute to weaken its appeal to the hearts and consciences of their fellows, and the result is seen in many an indirect and distant injury to faith. It is the mission of the Church and its ministers to carry on the work of the Apostles by bearing witness to certain truths and revelations; and if that witness be in any instance unworthily delivered, the force with which the truth appeals to the soul of man is proportionately weakened. *Wace: Bampton Lectures.*

Priestcraft. The whole system is one of *Church* instead of *Christ*; *priest* instead of *Gospel*; concealment of truth instead of manifestation of truth; ignorant superstition instead of enlightened faith; bondage where we are promised liberty—all tending to load us with whatever is odious in the worst meaning of priestcraft, instead of the free, affec-

tionate, enlarging, elevating, and cheerful liberty of the children of God. *Bishop McIlwaine.*

Penalty of murder. Thales Milesius, one of the wise men of Greece, being asked what was the most difficult thing in life, answered, "For a tyrant to live to old age." The application may be extended to the cruel, bloodthirsty, and murderers.

The triumph of the wicked. The triumph of the wicked is always short. When they feel themselves secure from evil and begin to boast of their triumph, then judgment overwhelms them. So it was with Belshazzar, Herod, and the fool of the Gospel. How soon Abel's blood called for vengeance of Cain! We cannot sin so quickly but God seeth us as quickly. How many have been stricken while the oath had been in their mouths, as Jeroboam was stricken while he spoke, that they might see they were stricken. Though a man sin often, and steal his sins as it were without punishment, yet at last he is taken napping, even while the wickedness is in his hand, and his day is set when he shall pay for all, whether it be twelve months or twelve years. "When it cometh, it will be soon."

HOMILETICS.

THE LAST HOURS OF A DOOMED PEOPLE.

(Verses 17-20.)

I. Every hope of rescue is disappointed. "Our eyes failed for our vain help: we have watched for a nation that could not save us" (ver. 17). Israel had been prone to rely on the help of Egypt, and was often bitterly deceived. In this instance the deluded inhabitants looked eagerly, till their eyes were weary, for the coming of a relief force from Egypt, but in vain. That treacherous kingdom, which had failed them so often before, again failed them in their extremity. Whatever aid they might expect from the neighbouring kingdoms with which Judah had been in friendly alliance, it did not come. When the soul is alienated from God, every reliable source of help is cut off. When God will not help us, man cannot.

II. Every avenue of escape is closely guarded. "They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets. Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles; they pursued us, they laid wait for us" (vers. 18, 19). The enemy was drawing his lines more firmly round the city; the investment was complete, and slowly but surely he was gaining the mastery over the city. Impatient with the little progress made and enraged with the stubborn resistance of the besieged, the Chaldeans missed no opportunity to do damage. Every stray wanderer in the streets was a

mark for their arrows, and those who attempted to escape from the festering city were at once seized.

III. There is a deepening conviction that the end is near. "Our end is near; our days are fulfilled, for our end is come" (ver. 18). The sight of the towers erected by the besiegers advancing in height filled the citizens with terror. Weakened with famine and disease, distracted with divisions among themselves, and alarmed with the steady encroachments of the enemy, they felt that further resistance was useless; they waited in sullen helplessness for the end. The end soon came.

IV. The last vestige of hope is destroyed in the capture of their king. "The anointed of the Lord was taken in their pits" (ver. 20). Feeble as Zedekiah was, he was still their king, "the anointed of the Lord." "And now that the state was falling, he was the very breath of life to the fugitives, who would have no rallying-point without him; whereas if he escaped, they might with him have found a refuge among some of the neighbouring nations, and as long as they had a king of David's line all hope of prolonging their national existence would not seem lost." But the seizure of Zedekiah in his desperate attempt to escape, and the cruelty of his infuriated captors in putting out both his eyes, quenched the last lingering hope of the doomed people. Their king was a sightless, helpless prisoner, and all was over. The national life was extinguished. We cannot but admire the dogged bravery of the people in their resolute defence of king and country; but it was the bravery of desperation and despair. The fiat of destruction had gone forth, and it was now fulfilled in every detail.

LESSONS.—1. *The nation that rebels against God is defenceless.* 2. *The threatenings of God against disobedience are not meaningless.* 3. *Between the threatening of doom and its accomplishment there is ample opportunity for repentance and reform.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 17. The weary watcher. 1. Eagerly longs for much-needed help. 2. Impairs his eyesight with the intensity of his vigil. 3. Is bitterly disappointed when he looks for help in vain.

Vers. 18, 19. The helplessly baffled. I. *Are everywhere menaced with danger.* "They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets" (ver. 18). II. *Retreat is cut off in every direction.* "Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles" (ver. 19). III. *Sullenly submit to the inevitable.* "Our days are fulfilled, for our end is come" (ver. 18).

Ver. 20. Royalty. 1. Is the symbol of government and protection. 2. Is the representative of national life and character. 3. Its degradation involves national disaster.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **Disappointment.** When Daniel O'Connell, on account of his ill-health, was ordered to leave England, he started for Rome, having had

for many years a desire to see that city. In the city of Genoa he was seized with paralysis, was unable to proceed farther, and died there, never having looked upon the longed-for sight.

A clever escape. When Mazzini fled from France, he had to risk being seized by the French police at Marseilles. He refused to be hidden as a stowaway, and when they came to look for him, they passed without notice a man in his shirt-sleeves coolly washing bottles in the cook's kitchen.

A sad end. Cardinal Pole, suspected even by Queen Mary, whom he had liked to serve, was on his death-bed when she died. Among the last sounds that fell on his ears must have been the bells of Westminster ringing the knell of the cause to which he had sacrificed his life; and before the evening he too had passed away, a blighted, broken-hearted man, detested by those whom he had laboured most anxiously to serve.

Attachment stronger than death. On the 18th of December 1851, Turner the painter died in the front room of 119 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, fronting the Thames. To an upper window, no longer able to paint, too feeble to walk, he had been wheeled every morning during those last days, that he might lose no light of the December sun on his beloved Thames.

The last parting.

“How shall we know it is the last good-bye?
The skies will not be darkened in that hour,
No sudden blight will fall on leaf and
flower,

No single bird will hush its careless cry,
And you will hold my hands, and smile or
sigh

Just as before. Perchance the sudden tears
In your dear eyes will answer to my fears;
But there will come no voice of prophecy;
No voice to whisper, ‘Now, and not again,
Space for last words, last kisses, and last
prayer,

For all the wild unmitigated pain
Of those who, parting, clasp hands with
despair.’

‘Who knows?’ we say; but doubt and fear
remain.

Would any *choose* to part thus unaware?”

A good king a blessing. Speaking of the reign of Leopold I. of Tuscany,

as compared with the despotism of the Medicis, Mr. Howells says:—“I confess that it has a great charm for my fancy. It is like a long stretch of sunlight in that lurid, war-clouded landscape of history, full of repose and genial, beneficent growth. For twenty-six years, apparently, the good prince got up at six o’clock in the morning and dried the tears of his people. In his time, ten years passed in which no drop of blood was shed on the scaffold. The hospitals that he founded, the order and propriety in which he kept them, justly entitled him to the name of Father of the Poor. He was happy because he saw his people were happy. He believed in God.”

Uncertainty of royal favours.

“Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye;
I feel my heart new opened. Oh, how
wretched

Is that poor man that hangs on prince’s
favours!

There is betwixt that smile we should
aspire to,

That sweet aspect of princes, and their ruin,
More pangs and fears than wars or women
have;

And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,
Never to hope again.” —*Shakespeare.*

HOMILETICS.

THE FATE OF THE MALEVOLENT.

(Verses 21, 22.)

I. Their malicious joy over the unfortunate is brief. “Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom” (ver. 21). Edom, though related to Judah, was her most relentless enemy. It was the enmity of inveterate envy. Judah had outdistanced Edom, and rose to superior greatness and power. This was the offence Edom could never forgive. She watched the downfall of Judah with a savage delight, and when the catastrophe came, which she did her best to accelerate, she gloated over it with a fiendish joy (Ps. cxxxvii. 7; Jer. xlix. 7–22). The prophet now ironically calls upon Edom to take her fill of her unnatural merriment, for it would soon be silenced and changed into a song with a different tune. Having made common cause with the enemies of God’s people and become their aiders and abettors in oppression, Edom must share in the calamities that overwhelmed them. Edom is the type of the enemies of the Church in all ages, who, instigated with “envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness,” exult in the misfortunes of God’s people. What a revelation is this of the possible wickedness of the human heart! Well might Vianny write, “The heart of the wicked swarms with sins like an anthill with ants. It is like a piece of bad meat—full of worms.” But the triumph of the morally bad is short.

II. They will be certainly punished for their wickedness. 1. *It will be a punishment involving suffering and disgrace.* “The cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked” (ver. 21).

"*Thou, too, shalt be drunk with the shame of ruin: thou, too, shalt expose thyself to contempt.*"—*Geikie*. The wine-cup of the Divine wrath will by-and-by be placed in the hands of His enemies, and they must drink it—drink it till they are infatuated with the intoxicating draught, and commit follies and sins that sink them into utter contempt. Now they know something of the bitterness of the suffering over which they had gloated when others were the victims. 2. *It will be a righteous punishment.* "He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins" (ver. 22). To uncover and expose sins is equivalent to punishing them. Edom was punished not arbitrarily and from caprice, but because of her iniquity. The Divine chastisements are in harmony with the law of universal righteousness. God knows exactly the time and the measure of punishment. The cup of His wrath is not passed on to either individual or nation until it is full. The wicked cannot escape.

III. *Their punishment will be intensified by the deliverance of the people whose miseries they ridiculed.* "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion: He will no more carry thee away into captivity" (ver. 22). Judah shall not be exiled again for the iniquity, the guilt of which is now expiated. It would be unjust to punish twice for the same offence. She has borne the punishment: it is finished; and she is now free—free to enter upon a course of obedience which will secure promised blessing. The tables are now turned. Judah is free: Edom is the sufferer; and it adds sharpness to the thorns that now distress her to know that her hated rival is delivered and is again in the ascendant. Envy gives the soul no rest, and deteriorates its capacity for nobler feelings.

"The cankering rust corrodes the brightest steel;
The moth frets out your garment, and the worm
Eats its slow way into the solid oak:
But Envy, of all evil things the worst,
The same to-day, to-morrow, and for ever,
Saps and consumes the heart in which it works."—*Cumberland*.

We should be careful not to exult over the miseries of others, as we know not how soon we may be in the same plight, and the memory of our inhuman conduct will increase our own suffering.

LESSONS.—1. *Only the wilfully malicious can rejoice over the distresses of others.* 2. *Inevitable wickedness is sure to receive its just recompense.* 3. *Punishment is concerned only with the guilt already incurred.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 21, 22. **Two kinds of joy.**

I. *The joy of the envious.* "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom" (ver. 21). 1. Is full of malice. 2. Is cruel. 3. Is unreal—the dry chuckle of the scornful. II. *The joy of the free.* "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion" (ver. 22). 1. Indicates relief from suffering. 2. Despair has given place to hope. 3. Has the ring of grateful reality.

Punishment. I. *Discovers and exposes sin.* "He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins" (ver. 22). II. *Stupifies and degrades the victim with*

the contents of its mingled cup. "Thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked" (ver. 21). III. *Is sure to overtake the transgressor.* "The cup also shall pass through unto thee" (ver. 21). IV. *Does not cease till its mission is fulfilled.* "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion" (ver. 22).

Ver. 22. **A message from God to thee.** I. *Our first message is one of comfort.* 1. A joyous fact. "The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished." Christ hath for His people borne all the punishment which they deserved. 2. To whom this message is sent. To the sinner conscious of his

sin. 3. A precious promise. "I will no more carry thee away into captivity." Thou art in captivity now, sorrowing on account of sin; but it is the last thou shalt ever have. In the world to come there is no captivity for thee.

II. *A burden of woe.* "He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom."

1. The daughter of Edom dwelt carelessly in the land of Uz, as if secure from danger. 2. Made merriment over the sorrows of others. 3. Cherished a vain hope, a self-sufficient confidence.

4. Was very proud. III. *Why are there these different messages?* 1. The reason of the message of mercy is sovereign. 2. Of the message of woe, Divine justice. IV. *What claim have these messages on our faith?* To be devoutly believed, because both messages are plainly revealed in the Word of God.—*C. H. Spurgeon.*

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Malice.

"For malice will with joy the lie receive,
Report, and what it wishes true, believe."
—*Yalden.*

Reproof of malice. St. Augustine is said to have had these two lines inscribed on his table to remind his guests of his wishes—

"Whoever loves an absent friend to jeer,
May hence depart, no room is for him here."

A malevolent tongue. The tongue of the slanderer is a devouring fire, which tarnishes everything it touches; which exercises its fury on the good grain equally as on the chaff, on the profane as well as on the sacred; which, wherever it passes, leaves only desolation and ruin; digs even into the bowels of the earth and fixes itself on things the most hidden; turns into vile ashes what only a moment before had appeared to us so precious and brilliant; acts with more violence and danger than ever in the time when it was apparently smothered up and almost extinct; which blackens what it cannot consume, and sometimes sparkles and delights before it destroys.—*Massillon.*

Wickedness. There have been men splendidly wicked whose endowments threw a brightness on their crimes, and

whom scarce any villainy made perfectly detestable, because they never could be wholly divested of their excellences; but such have been in all ages the corrupters of the world, and their resemblance ought no more to be preserved than the art of murdering without pain.

— I have seen men who, I thought, ought to have a whole conversion for each one of their faculties. Their natures were so unmitigatedly wicked that it cost more for them to be decent than for other men to be saints.—*Beecher.*

Sin will find you out. Men's sins often find them out, though no visible sign or token may betray this fact to the world. All may outwardly stand fair; there may be no breach in the worldly prosperity; nay, this may be ampler, more strongly established than ever; while yet there may be that within which forbids to rejoice, which takes all the joy and gladness out of life—the memory of that sin which was nothing when committed, but which now darkens all—the deadly arrow poisoning the springs of life, which will not drop from the side, which no force, no art of man's device can withdraw. To such Dr. Trench's advice is, to turn the tables on our sins, to find them out, and to take them all to God to be condemned, pardoned, and subdued; "condemned by Thy righteous judgments, O Father; pardoned by the precious blood of Thy dear Son, and subdued by the mighty operation of the Holy Ghost." This is the good, old-fashioned preaching of Apostles and preachers of the very oldest times.

The downward career of evil. In the Rabbinical books of the Jews they have a curious tradition about the growth of leprosy, that it began with the walls of a man's house; then, if he did not repent, entered his garments, till at last the disease covered his whole body. And thus it is with the growth of sin. It begins with neglect of duty; it may be of prayer, or the warning voice of conscience is unheeded. Habits of sin are formed, till at last the soul that lets God alone is let alone by God.—*Pilkington.*

CHAPTER V.

RECAPITULATION OF ZION'S CALAMITIES AND PRAYER.

THE verses of this chapter are not arranged according to the order of the alphabet, yet their number corresponds to its number. More distinctly than the preceding chapters this one shows the "parallelism" of Hebrew poetry, in which one clause of a verse is closely related by sentiment and construction to the other. The contents suggest that the circumstances of the writer impelled him to take a retrospect of what had befallen his fellow-countrymen, and to found, on the variety and intensity of their sorrows, a hope that their iniquities would be pardoned, and that they would receive from the Lord's hand tokens of His restored favour, according to the days wherein He had afflicted them.

Ver. 1. **Remember, O Jehovah, what has happened to us**—an application not to one who had forgotten, but to One who could consider *their affliction and pain with a view to forgive all their sins and redeem Israel out of all his troubles*; a prayer which is not so much an utterance concurrent with the nature of God, as concurrent with the partial knowledge and felt needs of the worshipper; **behold, and see our reproach, the reproach of Thy servants . . . wherewith Thine enemies have reproached, O Jehovah, the footsteps of Thine anointed.**

Ver. 2 begins to describe the substance of the reproaches. **Our inheritance, the land which was promised to Abraham, and of which his descendants had held possession for generations, is turned over unto strangers.** Indeed, all their property had passed into other hands; **our houses unto aliens.** Even if any small houses were left standing, after the Chaldeans had destroyed every important building in Jerusalem, besides breaking down the city walls, they were at the disposal of those foreigners.

Ver. 3. No recondite application of the terms of this verse—as that, "We are abandoned by Thee, our Father"—need be considered. The note of a Targum sufficiently defines them, "We are like the most desolate of beings." **We have become orphans, without a father.** A devastating war, a merciless capture of Jerusalem, a banishment to a far country of thousands of the population, must have caused reports of many among the "bread-winners" being dead or missing; hence it could be said virtually, if not really, **Our mothers [are] like widows,** the words being true of other families as well as of those whose head had perished.

Ver. 4. Not only are they orphaned and desolate, but they are cruelly mulcted. **Our water for money we have drunken.** The bitterness of the act was that water, perhaps from their own wells and cisterns, had to be paid for, and similarly to that, **Our wood has come for a price.** Held in such durance that they could not get the requisites for personal and domestic comfort, to which they had free access formerly, unless by bribing their custodians.

Ver. 5. It is best to suppose that the phrase, **On our necks we are pursued,** means, our pursuers keep so close as to be, as it were, holding our necks; yet, tired out by such persecution, **no rest is for us.**

Ver. 6. Judæa was on the verge of famine through the foragings of the invaders, and, under the ominous shadow of starvation, **To Egypt we have given the hand, i.e.,** imploring supplies of food, as is signified by the parallel clause, **to Assyria to be satisfied with bread.** The people appealed to a supposed friendly and to an openly hostile government; for the Babylonian empire, even in the height of its power, was occasionally spoken of as Assyria (Jer. ii. 18), into whose dominion it had entered.

Ver. 7. **Our fathers have sinned; they are not in the land of the living.** The hour of punishment had not come in their time. The measure of iniquity was not yet full; but the consequences of their *doings, which were not good*, had not been buried with them. The disruption of civil and religious order, by which we have so fearfully suffered, results from the guilt which was incurred by preceding generations. **We have borne their iniquities.** This truth is stated again and again in the Old Testament Scriptures (Exod. xx. 5; Num. xiv. 18; 2 Kings xxiii. 25, 26); it is, however, only half a truth, and becomes an error if understood to say that the descendants were not also guilty. This other half was beginning to dawn upon Israel. It is noted in ver. 16, and was boldly announced by the prophets of this period, Jeremiah (chap. xxxi. 29, 30) and Ezekiel (chap. xviii.). Yet God strikes the sins of forefathers with penal judgments on their children only when the children persist in sin, as their predecessors did. But such vicarious suffering placed them in a position like sin-bearers, and becomes ground of appeal for the exercise of Divine compassion.

Ver. 8. **Servants have ruled over us.** Who they were may be uncertain. It is a far-fetched supposition that they were the conquering chiefs, because "the Babylonians in general might be called slaves in comparison with the *kingdom of priests and sons of Jehovah.*" The suggestion rather is that the galling yoke was made doubly galling by the insolence and brutality of menials, "dressed in the brief authority of office," slaves in Oriental countries often rising to places of power. A parallel is mentioned by Nehemiah, who says (chap. v. 5), *Even their (i.e., the governor's) servants bare rule over them*; there was no deliverer from their hands.

Ver. 9. **With our lives we get our bread**—they jeopardised their lives when going to gather a scanty harvest, or to take from provisions which had been stowed away—because of the

sword of the desert, wielded by the predatory Bedawin, who would plunder and even kill those who were in possession of food. So Gideon had to get his wheat in secret, lest the Midianites should seize it (Judges vi. 11); and the ten men who bought their lives from the robbers and murderers of Gedaliah (Jer. xli. 8) drew from concealed stores of victuals.

Ver. 10. The bread, which was obtained at the risk of their lives, was not enough in quantity to nourish them. **Our skin is hot like an oven**; the feverishness is because of the burning heat of hunger. "Hunger dries up the pores of the skin, so that it becomes like as if it had been exposed to the burning heat of the simoom."

We must not fancy that the several distressing things alluded to befell every one of all classes. We should rather believe that some troubles were felt by one portion, while another portion had to bear different troubles. So the author proceeds to record what sufferings were endured by particular divisions of the population.

Ver. 12. The most gentle were outraged, and **princes were hanged up by their hand**—not the hand of the foe is referred to, though by him the cruel deed was perpetrated; still less is the reference to compulsory suicide, as Calvin surmises; but the hand of the princes was the leverage by which their bodies were lifted up. Whether they were first killed and then suspended, or were tortured by such suspension when every nerve and muscle was vibrating with life's waves, is a question to which no sure reply can be given; but probably the latter is hinted at. The bodies of Saul and his sons were fastened to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Sam. xxxi. 10–12); and more recent commentators refer to "Records of the Past," i. 33, in which an inscription of Sennacherib is quoted as saying of the people of Ekron, "The chief priests and noblemen I put to death; on stakes all round the city I hung their bodies;" and the practice seems to have been not uncommon among Assyrians and Babylonians. Still, impalement after death does not correspond distinctly to the atrocity mentioned here. **The faces—persons—of elders were not honoured**. Not only men high in rank, but also those who held responsible positions among the people—aged persons are spoken of after this—were treated with indignity in the insolence of conquest.

Ver. 13. The choice portion of the nation were forced to be nothing but mere burden-bearers. **Young men bare the mill**. They had to carry about, and no doubt to turn, the hand-mills to grind corn for their military masters, thus doing the work of women or of slaves; while the fuel, for cooking and other purposes, was laid on shoulders ill able to bear a load. **Boys stumbled [under] a burden of wood**.

Ver. 14. Entire collapse of interest in the common ways of life was shown by the abandonment of public meetings and social pastimes. **The elders ceased from [frequenting] the gate**. They had gone thither as to the usual gathering-place; they adjudicated, advised, had general intercourse, and received the marks of respect suggested by the law—*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head and honour the face of the old man* (Lev. xix. 32); but that resort was no longer theirs. Moreover, the buoyancy of youthful spirits was crushed down. **Young men ceased from their music, accompanied by instruments**.

Ver. 15. The iron had entered the soul. **Ceased is the joy of our heart, and past pleasures had become a pain; turned into mourning our dance**.

Ver. 16. **Fallen is the crown from our head**. That which was their honour has gone—the crown with which the Lord Jehovah had decked His chosen nation. *I put . . . a beautiful crown upon thine head . . . and thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty; for it was perfect through my majesty, which I had put upon thee* (Ezek. xvi. 12 and 14). Now it is in the dust, set at nought by all those who had admired it. So, as if in irrepressible acknowledgment that they themselves were responsible for the dismal change, the exclamation bursts forth, **Woe unto us! for we have sinned**—sinned not against a ritual or a code of law, but against a living Person—Maker, Monarch, Father. This second clause is in correlation with ver. 7, and expresses the share which their own iniquities had in the guilt which had drawn down such condign suffering as they were subjected to. Like their fathers, they had disowned truth and righteousness, and addicted themselves to false and unholy practices. This view of themselves, and confession of its evil nature, opens the eyes of the heart to look for the throne of grace.

Ver. 17. How depressing is the conviction of personal sin. **For this our heart has become faint**. Many sorrows had surged over them and exhausted the faculty of external and mental vision. **For these things our eyes are darkened**.

Ver. 18. The depression of heart meets its most striking symbol in that which, once the glory of the land, is now its reproach. **As to Mount Zion—regarded as embracing both the dwelling-place of Jehovah and the precincts of the sacred city, which is desolate; jackals roam in it**. These animals live in waste places, and avoid man's presence, so their wandering upon Zion proves that it has become a ruinous area, without inhabitant. *The place of the tabernacle of thy glory, the hill and the watch-tower, are turned into dens for wild beasts*.

Ver. 19. Nevertheless, whatever be the low estate of His sanctuary and people, the living God is and reigns. **Thou, O Jehovah, abidest for ever**. Not only is His continual existence denoted, but also that *Jehovah sitteth as king for ever* (Ps. xxix. 10), the same verb being used in this clause as in the Psalm quoted, and the next clause carries on the thought, **Thy throne from generation to generation**. Enemies may destroy the temple made with hands; they

are powerless to injure the kingdom of *Him who inhabits eternity*. Generations come and go with their rises and falls, *but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail*.

Ver. 20. The perpetuity of God's rule, amid all earthly changes, frames an appealing prayer. Reigning supreme over the army of heaven, it is impossible that He can renounce authority over the things of earth and man; then, **Why dost Thou forget us for ever, forsakest us for so long?** Is it not time for Thee to pluck Thy right hand out of Thy bosom and bring relief in the lifetime even of this generation? How bluntly petitioners address God when troubles press upon them! How ready to suppose His thoughts and ways must be like their own! How prone to fancy that, because their observation does not perceive His working, God can hardly care so much for His kingdom's honour as they do!

Ver. 21. **Turn us, O Jehovah, unto Thee, and we shall be turned;** a prayer which proves that a new heart has been given to those in whose name the writer speaks. Affliction has been a means of showing the blunders and sins of the past, and that the only remedy for them is in Jehovah Himself. They see that the reconciling power does not originate with themselves, but with Him; that He must draw them by a continual influence if they are to *walk in the light of His countenance*. We do not consider this request as merely for the restoration of their native land; we need to put a deeper meaning into it, which will, at least, indicate that they wanted to become true worshippers of the Lord God of their deliverances. The succeeding clause, however, seems to imply that they did not expect to attain to their desires unless they were repossessed with their former national organisation. **Renew our days as of old;** re-establish the gracious relations in which thou stoodest to us; let us again have country, city, and temple, priest, prophet, and king. *Cause every man to sit under his vine and under his fig-tree, and none make them afraid.*

Ver. 22. The two initial Hebrew particles of this verse signify that it is not a fact which is stated, but the elements of a hope, and may be introduced with, *This will come to pass, unless Thou hast utterly rejected us; art wroth against us exceedingly*. The under-thought is, *But this cannot be the case*. Thou wouldst not so disgrace the throne of Thy glory. Thou wouldst not so falsify the promises made to our fathers. Thou wouldst not always give occasion for the mocking heathen to say, *Where is now your God?*

"This conclusion entirely agrees with the character of the Lamentations, in which complaint and supplication continue to the end, not without an element of hope, which, as Gerlach says, 'merely glimmers from afar, like the morning star through the clouds, which does not indeed itself dispel the shadows of the night, though it announces that the rising of the sun is near, and that it shall obtain the victory'" (*Keil*).

HOMILETICS.

A PITEOUS APPEAL TO JEHOVAH.

(Verse 1.)

Once more, and for the last time, the prophet returns to his sorrowful theme. There is a fascination in it he cannot resist. Grief, unduly indulged, is apt to make us selfish, and so to accustom us to a grievance that we never wish to be without one: we coax and caress our troubles rather than seek to be rid of them. But the sorrow of the prophet arose from no mere personal distress. He was the mouthpiece to express the lamentations of the best spirits of his day over a national and world-wide disaster. His poetic and prophetic insight fitted him the more clearly to grasp and weigh the magnitude of the calamity. The profound and passionate grief with which he recited the leading incidents in the national catastrophe tended to stamp them with indelible distinctness upon his memory. He could never forget them, and it would seem as if he could not cease talking about them. As if with a clinging fondness for the theme and loathe to dismiss it, he passes in slow and final review the chief features of the siege and capture of Jerusalem. "Thus wailed the genius of Hebrew poetry over the desolation of Judah and Jerusalem! Other cities and countries have had their minstrels to lament their public sorrows, but the national elegies of the Jew alone have spread among all races of the earth, and remain fresh after twenty-five centuries. Nor are they even yet without deep and practical interest, recording as they do the catastrophe that awaits any community, however highly favoured, which forgets that public and private righteousness alone secures permanent prosperity" (*Geikie*). This fifth and last elegy begins and ends in prayer. It is a hopeful sign when trouble

brings us to our knees. We are then in the way of receiving comfort and delivering help. This verse is a *piteous appeal to Jehovah*.

I. Rising from the hearts of a suffering people. "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us." The trouble is not simply threatened and approaching: it is upon us; we are now in the midst of it, and cannot be in a worse plight than we are in already. Our nation ruined, our city gone, our Temple gone, and the spiked heel of the oppressor even now presses us in the dust. If Thou canst do anything for us, O Lord, do it now. The cry of real suffering has an irresistible pathos about it: there is the sound of tears in it. Such a cry never fails to reach the ears of Jehovah, and His pitying heart yearns to help the suppliant.

II. Is expressed by a people who regard their sufferings as a reproach. "Behold our reproach." We are sunk from dignity and greatness to abject humiliation and shame, from affluence to poverty. We are the people of Jehovah, chosen by Him and publicly acknowledged by Him before the world. He has wrought miracles of power on our behalf, and we thought we were lifted above the possibility of change and decay to which other nations were liable. But now we are abandoned by our Divine Protector, and have become objects of scorn by our oppressors. Our calamities reflect upon the name and honour of Him who has done so much for us: our reproach is His reproach. So they thought; and so think the privileged in all ages when trouble overtakes them. They are apt to blame any one but themselves, and are slow to see that their distresses are the fruits of their own sins.

III. Is uttered with the confidence that His help will be graciously afforded. "Remember, consider, behold." Remember what is past, the sufferings we have had; and behold and consider the present, the sufferings under which we at this moment writhe. Is this nothing to Thee, O God of our fathers? Is it a matter of indifference to Thee that Thine own children are in such abject woe? It cannot be. Our fathers sinned and so have we; but we repent. We are still the heirs of the promises. Lord have mercy, and fulfil Thy word unto Thy servants. It is a great help to prayer to believe that God not only sees and commiserates our miseries, but that He is able and willing to help us.

LESSONS.—1. *God is not indifferent to the sufferings of His people.* 2. *The suffering heart finds relief in prayer.* 3. *Prayer is the first stage in the process of religious reform.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

The hopefulness of prayer. 1. When it is the cry of distress. 2. When it encourages a humble and reverential familiarity with God. 3. When it is an earnest appeal from the weak to the strong. 4. When it is based on the assurance that God knows all about our case and is willing to succour.

All things that live from God their sustenance wait,
And sun and moon are beggars at His gate."
—Trench.

Prayer in trouble. Sinking times are praying times with the Lord's servants. Peter neglected prayer at starting upon his adventurous journey, but when he began to sink, his danger made him a suppliant, and his cry, though late, was not too late. In our hours of bodily pain and mental anguish we find ourselves as naturally driven to prayer as the wreck is driven upon the shore by the waves. The fox hies to his hole for protection, the bird flies to the wood for shelter, and even so the tried believer hastens to the mercy-seat for

ILLUSTRATIONS.—The need of prayer.

"When prayer delights the least, then learn to say,
Soul, now is greatest need that thou shouldst pray.
Say what is prayer, when it is prayer indeed?
The mighty utterance of a mighty deed.
The man is praying who doth press with might
Out of his darkness into God's own light.

safety. Heaven's great harbour of refuge is All-prayer. Thousands of weather-beaten vessels have found a haven there, and the moment a storm comes on it is wise for us to make for it with all sail.—*Spurgeon*.

Prayer should be importunate. Prayer pulls the rope below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others give but an occasional pluck at the rope; but he who wins with Heaven is the man who grasps the rope boldly, and pulls continuously with all his might.—*Biblical Treasury*.

God answers prayer. I once saw a grand procession in which an Oriental monarch, surrounded by a thousand life-guards, moved to the sound of all kinds of music. Some unknown subject had a request to urge. He knew the utter impossibility of ever breaking through the guards that day and night surrounded his majesty. That humble person perhaps had some dear friend in prison, who, according to Oriental custom, could never be tried or freed while the prosecutor's malice or purse held out. They have no Habeas Corpus law among nations without the Bible. This poor creature took the only possible way known to one unable to bribe the officers, and flung his petition over the heads of the guards, and it fell

at the feet of the sovereign. In a moment one of the life-guards pierced it with his bayonet and flung it back into the crowd. Alas! the proud, pleasure-loving monarch, amid the luxuriant splendours of his court, palace, army, and plans of reaping renown, never so much as dreamed of noticing the prayer of that broken heart and crushed spirit. Not thus does the King of kings treat the humblest suppliant who seeks His help.—*Van Doren*.

—I never was deeply interested in any object, I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything, but it came; at some time, no matter how distant a day, in some shape, probably the last I should have devised, it came.—*Adoniram Judson*.

Prayer brings deliverance. Prayer procures deliverance from trouble just as Naaman's dipping himself seven times in Jordan procured him a deliverance from his leprosy; not by any virtue in itself adequate to so great an effect, you may be sure, but from this, that it was appointed by God as the condition of his recovery, and so obliged the power of Him who appointed it to give force and virtue to His own institutions beyond what the nature of the thing itself could otherwise have raised it to.—*South*.

HOMILETICS.

THE MISERIES OF THE DISINHERITED.

(Verses 2-5.)

I. To see their possessions enjoyed by foreigners. "Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens" (ver. 2). The land of Canaan was God's gift to the Jews. It was promised to them long before they entered into possession. There was a time when it seemed they would not be permitted even to look upon their Beulah-land. But God kept His word, and, after long wandering and many disappointments, the tribes received their allotted inheritance. In beauty and fruitfulness they found the land all that it had been represented. For many happy years they sat under their own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make them afraid. It was a bitter disappointment to find themselves violently ejected, and their loved inheritance occupied by their enemies. The possessions of earth are liable to strange and sudden changes; but the heavenly inheritance is indefeasible, and can never be wrested from the faithful.

II. To be reduced to the condition of widows and orphans. "We are orphans and fatherless; our mothers are as widows" (ver. 3). Their misery was

comparable to the sad and lonely desolation of fatherless orphans and wives just bereaved of their husbands. The guardian, guide, and support of family life is taken away, and they are left to battle with the cold, un pitying world, surrounded with heartless and cruel enemies. It is a painful experience for any family to be reduced by a single stroke from affluence to penury and friendlessness. If God did not help the widows and the fatherless, their condition would be unbearable. The competition of life is keen enough to the most favoured ; but it is a terrible struggle to the lonely and friendless. The luxury of former years unfits many for the fierceness of life's conflict, and thousands go down into untimely oblivion.

III. To be compelled to pay for the food and fuel produced on their own property. "We have drunken our water for money ; our wood is sold unto us" (ver. 4). The bitterness of the complaint is intensified in not merely that they must pay for the necessities of life, but that it is their own property which they have to purchase. The water in their own house cisterns is taxed ; the wood in their own forests must be paid for—and they paid dearly for every fagot. "The captives were doubtless closely watched, and not allowed to stray from the place where they were detained in preparation for their removal to Babylon, and thus could obtain wood and water only by paying for them" (*Speaker's Commentary*). How would they long now for the sticks their little children used to gather for the fires in which they idolatrously baked cakes for the queen of heaven ! (Jer. vii. 18). It is in the hardships of life that we lament the wanton waste of more prosperous times.

IV. To be harassed by incessant toil. "Our necks are under persecution : we labour and have no rest" (ver. 5). We were pursued so actively that our enemies seemed ever so close upon us as to be leaning over our necks ready at once to seize us. We were tired out with being thus chased incessantly, and no opportunity was allowed us of refreshing our weary frames (*Speaker's Commentary*). Labour is necessary for health, for sustenance, for happiness. There is nothing servile in honest and necessary work, whether by hand or brain. Abraham fed his own flocks. Moses kept sheep in the desert. Paul stitched canvas tents while labouring as a pioneer among the Gentiles. The fathers of the Roman Republic ploughed their own fields, sowed the seed, and reaped their harvests with their own hands. But there is neither nobility nor pleasure in forced labour, especially in labour unrelieved by necessary rest. Life becomes one long, weary, monotonous, and depressing grind. And this is often the fate of the disinherited.

LESSONS.—1. *It is a great hardship to see our rightful inheritance violently transferred to strangers.* 2. *The loss of worldly property is not always the greatest calamity.* 3. *The truly good have an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 2-5. The sudden reverses of fortune. 1. From wealth to poverty (ver. 2). 2. From social happiness to loneliness (ver. 3). 3. From freedom to galling exactions (ver. 4). 4. From ease to excessive toil (ver. 5).

Ver. 2. Property. 1. Knows nothing of absolute ownership. 2. Is constantly changing hands. 3. Its loss by robbery and pillage a great hardship. 4. Its fickle tenure contrasts with the imperishable character of spiritual possessions.

Ver. 3. Bereavement. 1. One of the great curses of war. 2. The inevitable lot of humanity. 3. Brings pungent sorrow to somebody.

Vers. 4, 5. The loss of liberty. I. *Is painfully realised by the imposition of unjust exactions.* "We have drunken our water for money ; our wood is sold unto us" (ver. 4). II. *Is followed by oppression.* "Our necks are under persecution" (ver. 5). III. *Subjects to the slavery of incessant labour.* "We labour and have no rest" (ver. 5).

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **The sadness of national decline.** “Since first the dominion of men was asserted over the ocean, three thrones, of mark beyond all others, have been set upon its sands — the thrones of Tyre, Venice, and England. Of the first of these great powers only the memory remains; of the second, the ruin; the third, which inherits their greatness, if it forget their example, may be led, through prouder eminence, to less pitied destruction. The exaltation, the sin, and the punishment of Tyre have been recorded for us in perhaps the most touching words ever uttered by the prophets of Israel against the cities of the stranger. Her successor, like her in perfection of beauty, though less in endurance of dominion, is still left for our beholding in the final period of her decline, a ghost upon the sands of the sea, so weak, so quiet, so bereft of all but her loveliness, that we might well doubt, as we watched her faint reflection in the mirage of the lagoon, which was the city and which the shadow.” — *Ruskin*.

Bereavement has its consolations. A little boy once went out in the early morn, and was greatly delighted with the little globes formed by the dew on the brambles. He hastened back, and led his father out to see these miniature worlds; but when the father and son arrived, the sun was up, and had drawn up in vapour the globes that had hung on the brambles, and so displeased the child. The child cried, and said, “The angry sun has taken them all up.” The father looked up and saw the beautiful rainbow on the bosom of the cloud, and said, “There, my child, the sun has taken up the bramble globes, and they help to form that beautiful bow on the cloud.” Ah! my friends, God has taken up some of our friends, and have we not murmured? But where are they?

Ah! do they not form the beautiful bow round the throne of God?

Industry secures independence. He that hath a trade hath an estate, and he that hath a calling hath an office of profit and honour; but then the trade must be worked at and the calling followed. If we are industrious, we shall never starve, for at the working man’s house hunger looks in but dares not enter. Nor will the bailiff or the constable enter, for industry pays debts while despair increaseth them. — *Franklin*.

Compassion for the needy. King Oswald of Northumbria accompanied the monk Aidan in his long missionary journeys as interpreter. One day, as he feasted with the monk by his side, the thegn, a noble of his war-band, whom he had set to give alms to the poor at his gate, told him of a multitude that still waited fasting without. The king at once bade the untasted meat before him be carried to the poor, and his silver dish he divided piecemeal among them. Aidan seized the royal hand and blessed it. “May this hand,” he cried, “never grow old.”

Persecution defeats itself. The cruelty of Mary’s reign and the lurid fires of Smithfield had only worked in Londoners a fiercer conviction of the error and falsity of the Roman Catholic religion, and when Elizabeth came to the throne, the people thronged the streets and greeted her with acclamation, as though her coming were as the rising of the sun.

— Speaking of the persecutions and martyrdoms in the time of Queen Mary, Mr. Froude says, “Every martyr’s trial was a battle; every constant death was a defeat of the common enemy; and the instinctive consciousness that truth was asserting itself in suffering converted the natural emotion of horror into admiring pride.”

HOMILETICS.

HUMILIATING SUBJECTION.

(Verses 6–9.)

I. Personal liberty is surrendered for a livelihood. “We have given the hand to the Egyptian and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread” (ver. 6).

Absolutely it was Babylon that had just destroyed their national existence, but Jeremiah means that all feelings of patriotism were crushed, and the sole care that remained was the selfish desire for personal preservation. To secure this the people would readily have submitted to the yoke either of Egypt or Assyria, the great powers from which in their past history they had so often suffered (*Speaker's Commentary*). Life is sweet, and it is appalling to think how many there are ready to sell their conscience, their souls, their friends, their country for bread! The sting of want demoralises the soul. It is matter for unspeakable thankfulness when men are lifted above the degrading temptations of poverty.

II. **The penalty of continuance in sin.** "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities" (ver. 7). It is a frequent practice of the unfortunate to blame the past. Here the sufferers complain that their predecessors, who commenced the national apostasy, had died before the punishment began, and that they are left to bear alone the fatal consequences which previous transgressors had escaped. It was some time before the truth dawned upon their minds that they had adopted and continued with aggravated obstinacy the sins of their forefathers, and that there was quite sufficient guilt in their own iniquity to merit the chastisement they suffered. The course of sin is downward, ever downward, and plunges its victims into the most humiliating subjection.

III. **A painful experience to a high-spirited people when domineered over by inferiors.** "Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hands" (ver. 8). Among the things for which "the earth is disquieted and which it cannot bear," the proverb saith, "For a servant when he reigneth" (Prov. xxx. 21, 22). In Oriental countries slaves often rose to high office, and there were no doubt such in the Chaldean army. The rule of such is often maintained with unnecessary rigour. They seem to think that they can gain respect and reverence only by severity. The Jews fretted and chafed under the petty tyranny of men whom they regarded as in every respect their inferiors except in their cruel bondage. *Virgil* has said—

"Since slaves so insolent are grown,
What may not masters do?"

The Jews had rebelled against the wise and gentle rule of Jehovah and His servants the prophets. Now they are ruled by the tyranny of their enemies and of their slaves. The sinner cannot escape the operation of law. He only exchanges rulers.

IV. **The victims are compelled to snatch their food at the peril of their lives.** "We gat our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness" (ver. 9). Though they were willing to surrender their liberty for food, its supply was very uncertain and precarious. "This verse apparently refers to those who were left as delvers and vine-dressers in the land, and who, in gathering in such fruits as remained, were exposed to incursions of the Bedaween, here called *the sword of the desert*." Every morsel of food they ate was snatched as from the mouths of wild beasts. The next forage for food may cost them, not only their independence, but their lives. They had indeed to eat their bread with quaking and carefulness, as it had been predicted (Ezek. xii. 18, 19). There is no advantage in selling our souls for bread; it is a bad bargain. Honour is more precious than food, or than life itself.

LESSONS.—1. *War imposes great degradations on the conquered.* 2. *Sin is at the root of all humiliation and suffering.* 3. *Subjection is intolerable to those who have tasted the sweets of freedom.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 6, 8, 9. **The intense love of freedom for food** (ver. 6). 2. **Subjects**
life: 1. **Tempts men to barter their** to the oppressive tyranny of inferiors

(ver. 8). 3. Will run great risks in the struggle for maintenance (ver. 9).

Ver. 7. **Sin and punishment:** 1. Are closely linked together. 2. The sins, like the virtues, of one generation pass on in their consequence to the next. 3. Suffering on account of others is taken into account in God's dealing with individuals and with nations. 4. Every offender is punished only according to his own sin.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Mistaken views of life. Two old men, amateur naturalists, who had devoted their whole lives, one to ferns and the other to orchids, travelled together for many hours. At the end of their journey he who had cultivated ferns said to his companion with a sigh, "I have wasted my life: if I had it to live over again, I should devote it to orchids."

Life divinely ordered. Our life is a web woven by the hand of God, the thread reaching from our birth to our death. The woof is trouble, but still runs with it a weft of interwoven comforts.—*Adams*.

Sin in man. In man there will be a layer of fierce hyena or of timid deer running through the nature in the most uncertain and tortuous manner. Nero

is sensitive to poetry and music, but not to human suffering. Marcus Aurelius is tolerant and good to all men but Christians. The Tlascalans of Mexico loved, and even worshipped flowers, but they were cruel to excess, and sacrificed human victims with savage delight. The good and the evil lie close together, the virtues and the vices alternate, so is human power accumulated; alternately the metal and the rags, a terrible voltaic pile. In the well-bred animal the claw is nicely cushioned; the old Adam is presentable.—*A. F. Russell*.

Humiliation. It is with us as with the reeds which grow by the river-side; when the waters overflow, the reed bows its head and bends down, and the flood passes over without breaking it; after which it uplifts its head and stands erect in all its vigour, rejoicing in renewed life. So is it with us; we also must sometimes be bowed down to the earth and humbled, and then arise with renewed joy and trust.

Submission. Let us not charge God over-hastily with the untoward incidents of life. In the main we are the manufacturers of our own life-material. If you give the weaver none but dark threads, he can only fashion a sombre pattern.—*Halsey*.

HOMILETICS.

THE GALLING TYRANNY OF CONQUEST.

(Verses 10–13.)

I. There is the physical suffering occasioned by starvation. "Our skin is black like an oven because of the terrible famine" (ver. 10). The human body can bear a great deal, but it cannot resist, nor can it survive, the ravages of famine. The bloom of health fades from the cheek, the eyes shine with an unnatural lustre, and then lose all expression; the flesh is dried and parched, the skin becomes "fiery red like an oven, because of the fever-blast" of famine, and the whole frame becomes skeletonised. During one of the famines in Ireland there was a form of face which came upon the sufferers when their state of misery was far advanced, and which was a sure signal that their last stage of misery was nearly run. The mouth would fall and seem to hang, the lips at the two ends of the mouth would be dragged down, and the lower parts of the cheeks would fall, as though they had been dragged and pulled. There were no signs of acute agony, none of the horrid symptoms of gnawing hunger. The look was one of apathy, desolation, and death. The agony of want was past. Nothing could save.

II. Social purity is outraged. "They humbled the women in Zion, and the maids in the city of Judah" (ver. 11). History records revolting examples of the

excesses committed by a brutal soldiery in the mad delirium of conquest. War brings in its train worse consequences than wounds and death. There is a fouler lust than the lust of military glory. The pure and unoffending are dishonoured. The sanctity of social life is invaded, and its sacred laws violated.

III. Rank and age are treated with indignity. "Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured" (ver. 12). See exegetical notes on this verse. It was a barbarity of ancient warfare that the conqueror paid so little regard to the feelings of the conquered. To the humiliation of defeat was added whatever could pain and degrade the vanquished. The princes of the royal blood and magistrates who had grown old in their lengthened term of office were treated with scant courtesy. The conqueror seemed to glory in parading the most illustrious of his captives under the most ignominious conditions. There were noble exceptions to this rule, but they were so rare that history has not failed to chronicle them.

IV. Young men and children are forced into the performance of the most menial and exhausting tasks. "They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood" (ver. 13). To grind the corn in the hand-mill was the work of female slaves. It was a great blow to the self-respect and ambition of the young men who were of legal age for military service to be condemned to this menial work. The little Jewish children, whose tender years should have been a sufficient protection against such cruelty, staggered under the loads of firewood they were compelled to carry for the Chaldean soldiers, who indulged in inhuman sport at the brave little fellows as they fell exhausted under their crushing burdens. Many of the children would be crippled for life. It is one of the praiseworthy features of nineteenth-century civilisation that so much care is shown in the protection and healthy development of child-life.

LESSONS.—1. *Woe to the people who fall into the hands of a heartless conqueror!* 2. *There are worse sufferings than the sense of being vanquished.* 3. *The tyrant conqueror has no respect for sex, or rank, or age.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 10. The sufferings of famine.

1. Apparent in their ghastly physical results. 2. Reduce all ranks to a common level. 3. Are intensified by conscious defeat and humiliation.

Vers. 11–13. The atrocities of war.

1. The pure and defenceless are defiled (ver. 11). 2. Princes and aged counsellors are treated with contempt and cruelty (ver. 12). 3. The spirit of the young is crushed with overpowering burdens (ver. 13).

thrive in their shadow, kept the ground open, and held the water in countless natural wells for the use of the soil in droughts. But all the undergrowth dying when its protecting forests were felled, the scanty showers percolated into the streams at once, causing rare floods and frequent droughts. The droughts yielded no harvests, and no harvests were followed by famine, pestilence, and death.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—The cause of famine.

For unknown years the Persians have been cutting off their trees, and diminishing their rainfall thereby. Nay, not only has the removal of the forests decreased the supply, but it has wasted whatever rain fell. For the roots of the trees and of all the innumerable shrubs, bushes, vines and ferns that

The fascination of lust. You will go on in your lust and your sins, despite warnings, despite advice, until you perish in your guilt. How worse than children are grown-up men! The child who goes for a merry slide upon a pond, if he be told that the ice will not bear him, starts back affrighted, or, if he daringly creeps upon it, how soon he leaves it if he hears but a crack upon the slender covering of the water! But

you men have conscience, which tells you that your sins are vile, and that they will be your ruin. You hear the crack of sin as its thin sheet of pleasure gives way beneath your feet; ay! and some of you have seen your comrades sink in the flood and lost, and yet you go sliding on. Worse than childish, worse than mad, are you, thus presumptuously to play with your everlasting state.—*Spurgeon*.

Age dishonoured.

“I have lived long enough. My way of life
Is fallen into the sere and yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have.”—*Shakespeare*.

Helplessness appeals to our pity.

Thus was the heart of the rough sailor touched when, tossing with other castaways in an open boat on the open sea, he parted with a morsel of food, which, hidden with more care than misers hide their gold, he had reserved for his own last extremity. Around him lay men and women, some dead, with glassy

eyes, some dying, and these reduced to ghastly skeletons; but none of these moved him to peril his own life for theirs. The object of his noble and not unrewarded generosity—for as if Heaven had sent it on purpose to reward the act, a sail speedily hove in sight—was a gentle boy, that, with his face turned on hers, lay dying in a mother's arms, and between whose teeth the famished man put his own last precious morsel.—*Guthrie*.

The atrocities of war. I look on war with a horror which no words can express. I have long wanted patience to read of battles. The thought of man, God's immortal child, butchered by his brother, the thought of sea and land stained with human blood by human hands, of women and children buried under the ruins of besieged cities, of the resources of empires and the mighty powers of nature all turned by man's malignity into engines of torture and destruction—this thought gives to earth the semblance of hell. I shudder as among demons.—*Channing*.

HOMILETICS.

BUSINESS AND RECREATION.

(Verses 14, 15.)

I. Are necessary in all organised communities. Commercial activity and prosperity lead to a more highly organised condition of social life. To prevent the clashing and confusion of the multiplicity of interests generated by an increasing commerce, certain rules are laid down for general observance. It is only thus that law and order can be maintained. It is soon recognised that business and pleasure must be judiciously combined in order to develop a healthy and vigorous people. Incessant labour would grind down and destroy the force of the national character, and an uninterrupted round of pleasure would weaken and dissipate its enterprise and energy. The happy medium in promoting what is best in both individual and national life is found in the wise alternation of work and recreation.

“Run if you will, but try to keep your breath;
Work like a man, but don't be worked to death.”

II. Are evidences of a happy and contented people. The gate of an Eastern city is the common rendezvous of the citizens for both business and recreation. There the venerable counsellors sit in repose and dignity to discuss and settle disputes. There the traders vend their wares. There the young life of the city expresses its exuberant joy in song and dance. Here we have a picture of prosperity, peace, and happiness. No people will be long content where there is not a thriving commerce, a reverence for law and age, ample employment and food, and the opportunity for innocent recreation.

III. **Their absence a pathetic sign of general desolation.** "The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning" (vers. 14, 15). The aged magistrates no longer frequent the gate, the bazaars of the merchants are deserted, the busy murmur of buying and selling is hushed, the instruments of music are laid aside unstrung, the voice of singing is no longer heard, and the spirits of the youthful dancers are crushed. Business and pleasure alike are abandoned. The joy of happier times is turned into mourning. The prophet could give no more graphic a picture of the desolation and ruin that had settled down upon the land.

LESSONS.—1. *The character and condition of a nation may be read in its commerce and recreations.* 2. *Work and play are alike necessary in the development of national life.* 3. *When the spring of enterprise is broken, a nation sinks into decay.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 14, 15. **The extinction of national life:** 1. When the wise and aged are no longer interested in public affairs. 2. When the voice of mirth is hushed. 3. When youth has lost its elasticity and hope.

ILLUSTRATIONS. — **The dignity of labour.** It is time that the opprobrium of toil were done away. Ashamed of toil, art thou? Ashamed of thy dingy workshop or dusty labour-field, of thy hard hand, scarred with service more honourable than that of war, of thy soiled and weather-stained garments, on which Mother Nature has embroidered, amidst sun and rain, amidst smoke and steam, her own heraldic honours? Ashamed of these tokens and titles, and envious of the flaunting robes of imbecile idleness and vanity? It is treason to Nature, it is impiety to Heaven. Toil—toil either of the brain, of the heart, or of the hand—is true nobility.

Business not to absorb all our time. Who gave thee leave, Christian, to overlade thyself with the encumbrances of life? Is not God the Lord of thy time, as of everything else? He does indeed allow thee a fair portion for the lower employments of the body, but did He ever intend to turn Himself out of all? This is as if the sailors, who are allowed by the merchant some small adventure for themselves, should fill the ship, and leave no stowage for his goods; or as if a servant should excuse himself to his master, when reproved for neglecting his duty, by saying he could not do it because he was drunk.—*Gurnall*.

Business and religion. Piety does not retreat from business, but it seizes business, sanctifies it, and makes it sacred. If I understand religion, it is to open a shop, it is to freight ships, it is to keep accounts, it is to write up your ledgers, it is to wear an apron till it be as holy as a bishop's sleeve, and to wield a spade as responsibly and devoutly as a monarch sways a sceptre. The true characteristic of religion is to go down into everything, rise up to the highest, till, like the atmosphere, it embraces all in its beneficent and beautiful folds.—*Cumming*.

Recreation. Lute-strings sound all the sweeter for being sometimes let down; and fields sowed every year become barren. So it is with body and mind.

—A primitive Christian playing with birds vindicated his conduct by comparison with the bow, which, if constantly bent, becomes useless. Recreation is a second creation.

Pleasure itself unsatisfying. George Moore, when a wealthy man, wrote in his diary—"After this we kept a great deal of company. The house was looked upon as a work of art. All our friends expected to be invited to see it and partake of our hospitality. We accordingly gave a large dinner weekly, until we had exhausted our numerous friends and acquaintances. But happiness does not flow in such a channel. Promiscuous company takes one's mind away from God and His dealings with men; and there is no lasting pleasure in the excitement."

HOMILETICS.

THE LOSS OF HONOUR.

(Verse 16.)

I. Honour is the crown of individual character. Honour is moral rectitude, the crown and dignity of the true man.

"Say what is honour? 'Tis the finest sense
Of justice which the human mind can frame,
Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim,
And guard the way of life from all offence
Suffered or done."—*Wordsworth*.

Moral rectitude is not a natural possession; it is the gift of Divine grace. It must be humbly and penitently sought, gratefully received, and strengthened and increased by incessant exercise. It is all of grace, and this grace sheds a glory and lustre upon the soul. As the diamond in the ring, so is grace to the soul. A heart beautified with grace has the picture of the King of heaven hung in it. It is dignified with the reflected splendour of the Divine majesty.

II. When honour is lost, man is disrowned. "The crown is fallen from our head." Israel not only lost their national king, and with him their national independence, but they lost their moral kingship, their personal righteousness; and this they lost before they were deprived of their earthly king. All that had given them rank and honour was tumbled in the dust.

"Better to die ten thousand deaths
Than wound my honour."

"Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;
Take honour from me, and my life is done."

III. Honour is lost when righteousness is abandoned. "Woe unto us that we have sinned." Afflicted Judah is getting clearer light. In the seventh verse they still cling to the idea that their national calamities were to be ascribed to the sins of their ancestors. Now they see the enormity of their own sins, and acknowledge that they deserved chastisement. Man is invulnerable to the assaults of the enemy and to the heaviest blows of misfortune and suffering while he retains his integrity. He is fenced round with the unconquerable protection of the God in whom he trusts. It is when he is untrue to himself, to his highest sense of honour, that he is untrue to God, and, falling away from righteousness, he becomes disrowned, and sinks into disgrace and misery.

LESSONS.—1. *Righteousness confers dignity.* 2. *That man suffers unspeakable loss who does not act up to his holiest impulses.* 3. *When a man loses a sense of honour, he may sink to any depth of infamy.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Ver. 16. The degradation of sin: abhorrence. 3. The third woe is God's leaving us. 4. The fourth woe is all kinds of punishment—an Iliad of evils. —*Bishop Ussher*.

1. Begins in personal unfaithfulness.
2. It is undignified to sin. 3. The course of sin ends in misery and in woe.

A series of woes. "Woe unto us that we have sinned." 1. The first woe is the polluting of the soul by sin. 2. The second woe is God's hatred and

ILLUSTRATIONS.—True dignity.

"True dignity is never gained by place,
And never lost when honours are withdrawn."—*Massinger*.

"Ye proud, ye selfish, ye severe,
How vain your mask of state;
The good alone have joy sincere,
The good alone are great."—*Beattie*.

Fallen greatness.

"I have ventured,
Like little wanton boys that swim on bladders,
This many summers in a sea of glory,
But far beyond my depth: my high-blown pride
At length broke under me; and now has left
me,

Weary and old with service, to the mercy
Of a rude stream, that must for ever hide me.
Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye!"
—*Wolsey*.

Degradation. That which renders men so unwilling to believe themselves capable of union with God is but the sense of their own degradation. I would gladly be informed whence this creature, who acknowledges himself so weak, obtains the right to measure and limit the Divine mercy as his own fancy suggests. Man under-

stands so little the nature of God that he understands not himself; and yet, troubled by the contemplation of his own condition, he boldly pronounces that it is beyond the power of God to qualify him for this connection.—*Pascal*.

The agony of dishonour. The most terrible blow that General Grant ever knew was when the bank in which he was a partner had suspended payment. Not only was he ruined, his sons and daughters penniless by reason of all their savings invested in it being lost; but after a few days there came out a horrible story of craft and guile, and it was seen that his honoured name had been used to entice and decoy hosts of friends, to their own injury and Grant's discredit. Imputations were even cast on the fame that belonged to the country, and this blow was worst of all: the shock of battle was less tremendous, his physical agonies less acute.

HOMILETICS.

RELIGIOUS DECLENSION.

(Verses 17, 18.)

I. Evident in the desolation of the sanctuary. "The mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it" (ver. 18). The foxes or jackals were very likely attracted to the ruinous site of Zion by the bodies of the slain, which they devoured for food and, finding how completely the place was deserted, they remained in undisturbed possession. How different from the time when the Temple services were in full swing and the city crowded with happy worshippers! Religion is at a low ebb when the house of God is neglected and its services disregarded; it is lower still when the sanctuary is closed and its mouldering stones are covered with mosses and lichens; but it has got to the lowest depth when the building is demolished and scattered in ruins. To this pass had all the pretentious religionism of Judah now come.

II. Is a reason for depression and sorrow. "For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim" (ver. 17). The Jews of all ranks and classes would lament the national disasters—the loss of national honour in the fall of their king, the loss of wealth and influence, the loss of independence and liberty; but the pious Jews would lament most of all the loss of religion. They sorrowed till their hearts became faint and their eyes grew dim with tears. We may well grieve over the loss of property and friends, of worldly comforts and necessities, but the devout heart sorrows most of all over the decline of religion and the cessation of the worship of God.

III. Should lead to much heart-searching as to its cause. "For this—for these things—because of Zion which is desolate" (vers. 17, 18). To the Jewish mind the Temple was the residence and throne of Jehovah, the symbol of worship, the embodiment of the national religious life. The destruction of the Temple

carried with it the doom of religion: no Temple, no religion. It is true that genuine religion is independent of temples and buildings, but as a matter of fact it does not exist long without them. Individual piety may flourish without a material temple, but collective and organised religion can be maintained only by continued association and intercourse, and the sanctuary becomes a necessity of associated religious life. Those who talk so grandiosely about worshipping God in the temple of Nature rarely worship Him at all anywhere. Where there is no recognised sanctuary there is no rally-point for worshippers, and religion is disorganised and depressed. The same result ensues when the house of God is habitually neglected.

LESSONS.—1. *Religious declension is at the root of national decay.* 2. *The people of God should be always deeply concerned in religious extension.* 3. *Religious declension is sincerely lamented by the good.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 17, 18. **The disasters of the Church:** 1. Create profound concern in the hearts of the good. 2. Should be deplored by every member of the commonwealth. 3. Mean that there has been gross unfaithfulness somewhere.

Ver. 18. **A deserted sanctuary:** 1. A pathetic and suggestive sight. 2. An evidence of indifference and sin. 3. A reproach that should be promptly wiped away.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**Religious declension.** The consequences which Moses foretold (Deut. xxix. 24, 25) as the result of the religious defection of the people were such as no human wisdom could foresee or experience suggest. The practice of idolatry did not prevent the aggrandisement of ancient Rome, nor any mere statesman ensure the accomplishment of a prophecy that military success should always attend the worship of the one true God, and that military discomfiture should always follow idolatry. It is evident that Moses derived his accurate knowledge of futurity from immediate inspiration of God.

Religious sham. A religion that does not take hold of the life that now is, is like a cloud that does not rain. A cloud may roll in grandeur and be an object of admiration, but if it does not rain, it is of little account so far as utility is concerned. And a religion that consists in the observance of magnificent ceremonies, but does not touch

the duties of daily life, is a religion of show and of sham.

Church-going not the end of religion. I fear there are some who imagine that church-going is in itself the aim and end of all religion. No mistake can be more deplorable or pernicious. It is a blunder as egregious as it would be for a visitor to a manufactory to suppose that the machinery was all set in motion merely to be gazed at, and to keep employed the people who are engaged in tending it. The manufacturer who lays out his capital in such costly apparatus would find but an unsatisfactory return at the end of the year if there had not been a given quantity of finished goods for profitable sale in the market. So it is with church-going. It is wretched work if the worship of the house of God begins and ends with the prayers uttered there.—*Hooper.*

Mercenary religion. One of the causes that led to the overthrow of religion in Ephesus was the growing wealth attached to the Temple of Diana. The priesthood established deposit banks. Kings and private individuals intrusted their money to the care of the goddess, and the priests reinvested this for a profit. But gradually the idea of religious sanctity gave place to that of commercial enterprise, and the temple became fair game for attack and robbery.

Decay of religion. The most curious phenomenon in all Venetian history is the vitality of religion in private life, and its deadness in public policy.

Amidst the enthusiasm, chivalry, or fanaticism of the other States of Europe, Venice stands from first to last like a masked statue; her coldness impenetrable, her exertion only aroused by the touches of a secret spring. That spring was her commercial interests—this the one motive of all her important political acts or enduring national animosities. She could forgive insults to her honour, but never rivalry in her

commerce. She calculated the glory of her conquests by their value, and estimated their justice by their facility. While all Europe around her was wasted by the fire of its devotion, she first calculated the highest price she could exact from its piety for the armament she furnished, and then, for the advancement of her own private interests, at once broke her faith and betrayed her religion.—*Ruskin*.

HOMILETICS.

AN EARNEST PRAYER FOR RESTORATION.

(Verses 19–22.)

I. Acknowledges the eternal sovereignty of Jehovah. “Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; Thy throne from generation to generation” (ver. 19). The throne of Judah is fallen, but not so the throne of God. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Israel, and all the nations of the earth may rise and fall, but God is unchanged. The fact of the perpetuity of the Divine government of the world forms the basis of a hope that, however desperate may be the condition of His people, God can restore them. If the throne of God was like the fickle governments of earth, there would be no prospect of recovery. All true prayer has the assurance of being heard and answered in the fact of the righteousness of an unchangeable God.

II. Deprecates the continued absence of the Divine favour. “Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?” (ver. 20). If Thy government is continuous, why are we forgotten and abandoned? If Thy throne in heaven is immovable, why is Thy throne in our earthly Zion overthrown? Thou didst once care for us and love us, and the memory of that happy time still keeps our hope alive. Thy favour was the joy and the sunshine of our lives; its absence is at the root of all our misery. Low as we have sunk, it cannot be that Thou hast utterly and for ever given us up. Cast us not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from us. Restore unto us the joy of Thy salvation. The soul that yearns in prayer for the Divine favour is on the brink of a glorious vision.

III. Supplicates the grace of genuine repentance. “Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (ver. 21). Repentance is a turning about. For some time the course of Judah had been in one direction—wandering from God, and sinking into ever lower depths of sin and misery. Now there is a thoughtful pause, an arrest of the downward career. What has brought this about? Prayer; and that prayer becomes more eager and earnest as it becomes more evident that rescue is at hand. True prayer recognises that God alone can give repentance and renew the glory of the golden days of old. When the heart is changed, our outward circumstances soon alter for the better. When Judah regained the favour of God, she also regained lost temporal blessings.

IV. Is urged with the assurance that God cannot utterly reject the truly penitent. “But Thou hast utterly rejected us; Thou art very wroth against us.” *Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us, unless Thou art very wroth against us.* This is stated as a virtual impossibility. Geikie translates the verse, “Thou wilt not surely wholly forget us? Thou wilt not be angry with us beyond measure?” The miserable results of their repudiation by Jehovah become the ground of a

confident appeal to Him. He heard the prayer, and at the end of seventy years the Jews were restored to their own land. The Book of Lamentations ends, as it begins, with a wail; but the concluding wail, unlike the first, has in it a joyous strain of hope. In many ancient MSS. the twenty-first verse is repeated after the twenty-second, to make a more agreeable finish when the book was read in the Synagogue; but Jeremiah did not think this arrangement necessary. He concludes with the refrain of what had been the burden of his sorrowful monologue, because he is so confident of help and restoration. "The message of God to the soul, even in threatenings, is ever in truth one of comfort." The darkest night of suffering and sorrow is followed by the tranquillising hope of the golden daybreak.

LESSONS.—1. *When the Church begins to pray there is hope of revival.* 2. *True prayer is ever accompanied with repentance.* 3. *God not only hears, but answers the prayer of the contrite.*

GERM NOTES ON THE VERSES.

Vers. 19, 20. **The unchangeable God.** I. *His government is in perpetual activity.* "Thou remainest for ever, Thy throne from generation to generation" (ver. 19). II. *He cannot forget His people.* "Wherefore dost Thou forget us for ever?" (ver. 20). III. *He will not for ever stand aloof from His people.* "Wherefore dost Thou forsake us for so long time?" (ver. 20).

Vers. 21, 22. **A prayer for repentance.** I. *Recognises that repentance is a Divine act.* "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord; renew our days as of old" (ver. 21). II. *When God gives repentance it is effectual.* "And we shall be turned" (ver. 21). III. *When God gives repentance it is evident His wrath is withdrawn, and He again accepts us.* "Unless Thou hast utterly rejected us; unless Thou art very wroth against us" (ver. 22). But this cannot be, for He gives repentance. He "renews our days as of old."

ILLUSTRATIONS.—**The eternity of God.** Would you gain some idea of the eternity past of God's existence? Go to the astronomer and bid him lead you with him in one of his walks through space; and as he sweeps outward from object to object, from universe to universe, remember that the light from those filmy stains on the deep pure blue of heaven now falling on your eye has been travelling space for a million of years.—*Mitchell.*

Prayer the melody of misery.

"Oh, hearts that break and give no sign,
Save whitening lip and fading tresses,
Till death pours out his cordial wine,
Slow-dropped from misery's crushing
presses:

If singing breath or echoing chord
To every hidden pain were given,
What endless melodies were poured,
As sad as earth, as sweet as heaven!"

—O. W. Holmes.

Suffering prompts prayer. Afflictions make us most frequent and fervent in pouring forth our supplications unto God. In our prosperity we either utterly neglect this duty, or perform it carelessly and slothfully; but when we are brought into calamities, we flee to Him by earnest prayer, craving His aid and help. And as the child, fearing nothing, is so fond of his play that he strays and wanders from his mother, not so much as thinking of her, but if he be scared or frightened with the sight or apprehension of some apparent or approaching danger, presently runs to her, casts himself into her arms, and cries out to be saved and shielded by her, so we, securely enjoying the childish sports of worldly prosperity, do so fondly dote on them that we scarce think of our Heavenly Father; but when perils approach and are ready to seize upon us, then we flee to Him and cast ourselves into the arms of His protection, crying to Him by earnest prayer for help in our extremity.—*Downe.*

The value of prayer. If the whole

world in which we live is but a continual temptation, if all around appears to agree with our inward corruptions to weaken and seduce us, if riches bribe and indigence sours, if prosperity elevates and afflictions abase us, if business dissipates and rest enervates, if the sciences exalt and ignorance bewilders us, if commerce exposes us too much and solitude leaves us too much to ourselves, if pleasure seduce us and holy works make us proud, if health awakens the passions and sickness produces murmurings—in a word, if since the fall of man all that surrounds us and all that is in us is perilous, in so deplorable a situation, O my God, what hope of salvation remains for us? If our sighs do not incessantly ascend from the depth of our misery towards the throne of Thy mercy, until Thou

deignest to assist us and to rescue us from our fallen state.—*Massillon*.

God answers prayer. When poor men make requests to us, we usually answer them as the echo does the voice—the answer cuts off half the petition. We shall seldom find among men Jael's courtesy, giving milk to those that ask water, except it be as this was, an entangling benefit, the better to introduce a mischief. There are not many Naamans among us that, when you beg of them one talent, will force you to take two. But God's answer to our prayers is like a multiplying glass, which renders the request much greater in the answer than it was in the prayer.—*Bishop Reynolds*.

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than the world dreams of."

—*Tennyson*.

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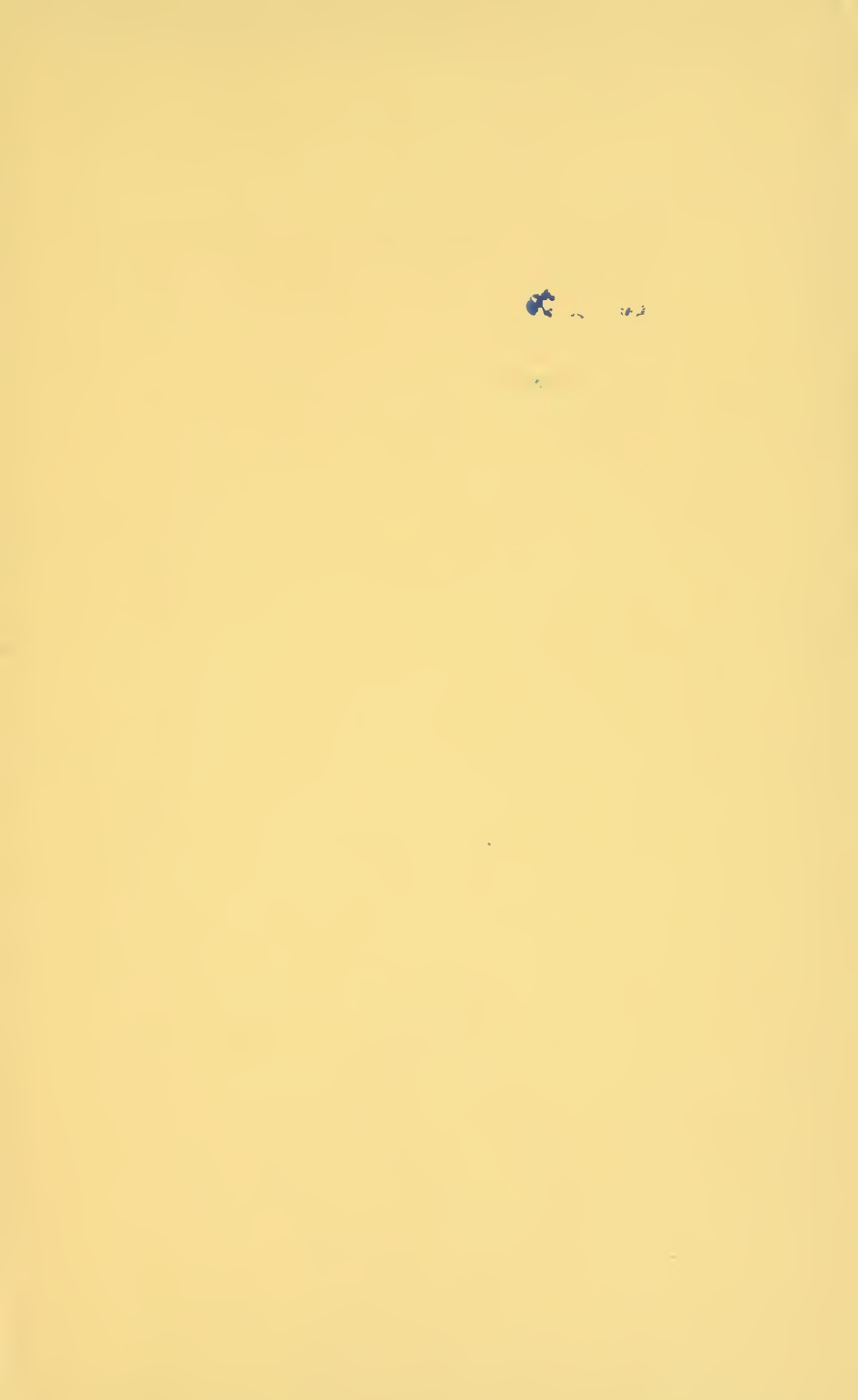
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